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General Assembly

Sixty-sixth session

Official Records

19th plenary meeting
Friday, 23 September 2011, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 9.15 a.m.

Address by Mr. John Evans Atta Mills, President of the Republic of Ghana

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Mr. John Evans Atta Mills, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. John Evans Atta Mills, President of the Republic of Ghana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mills: Permit me to extend hearty congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session. May I also use this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to your predecessor, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for the able manner in which he presided over the sixty-fifth session.

Ghana joins the rest of the world in welcoming our sister country, South Sudan, to the family of the United Nations. It is our fervent hope that South Sudan, having taken its rightful place in this body, will grow and prosper. We also want to congratulate the Secretary-General on his appointment to a second term. It is a clear manifestation of his excellent performance during his first term.

It is a long-established fact that United Nations peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities have contributed immensely to the Organization's efforts for the maintenance of international peace and security over the years. We observe, however, that this activity continues to take on complex dimensions that require long-term planning and urgent reforms in order to enable the United Nations to tackle the challenges that crop up.

It is in this connection that Ghana reaffirms its support for the ongoing reform agenda being undertaken by the United Nations in consultation with the troop- and police-contributing countries. However, we do want to emphasize that regular tripartite consultations are needed among the United Nations, the Secretariat, the Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries.

As one of the top contributors of police and troops to United Nations activities, Ghana remains unwavering in its commitment to the ideals and objectives of the United Nations. Accordingly, I want to assure Members that as long as financial, human and material capacities exist at the national level, Ghana will continue to provide troops and police personnel for United Nations operations.

But it is important that the burden and costs to the United Nations of these activities be equitably shared among Member States. We think that countries such as Ghana that provide troops and police personnel for these operations must be financially supported by donor countries in a timely manner. We are aware of

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the financial constraints existing at all national levels, but we want to encourage Member States to meet their obligations to the United Nations so that the Organization can execute its mandate.

Allow me to pay tribute to all United Nations personnel — including those from my own country, Ghana — who in the course of the year made the ultimate sacrifice while on United Nations peacekeeping missions. May their souls rest in peace and their sacrifice be cherished and remembered.

Another issue that we are following with keen interest is the proposed arms trade treaty. Ghana fully supports this and thinks it is necessary. Hence our satisfaction thus far with the outcomes of the meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty held in New York last year and in February and March this year.

As a nation, we consider a strong and effective arms trade treaty to be an indispensable step in preventing the flow of arms to destinations where they can cause mayhem and wreak havoc by fuelling conflicts that may in turn undermine national and regional peace, security and development, or exacerbate tensions that in the long run may create situations that need the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers.

For developing countries such as Ghana, the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and other conventional weaponry continues to pose a serious threat to our national security and to our socio-economic and political stability, given the linkage to other crimes such as terrorism, organized crime, drug trading and indeed human trafficking, among others. It is therefore imperative that the remaining meetings of the arms trade treaty Preparatory Committee produce proposals that would close the loopholes that allow the flow of these weapons from legitimate to illicit markets.

The United Nations reached a significant milestone with the launch of UN-Women — the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. It is critical as member States of the international community that we break gender stereotypes, which after all are the root cause of the myriad of gender-inequality challenges facing us throughout the world. Ghana's efforts are focused on addressing gender imbalances and misconceptions and on improving the living conditions of women and girls, bearing in mind that in solving the gender issue we would be taking concrete steps towards the attainment of a majority of the Millennium Development Goals. It is our expectation that the objectives of UN-Women will be met.

On the occasion of the High-level Meeting to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, Ghana recognizes the progress so far made in this area by the opportunity given to Member States to reaffirm and strengthen their political commitment to the prevention of and fight against racism and racial discrimination in all its forms. We are confident that the effective implementation of the outcome policy (see resolution 66/3) will indeed ensure the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by all, including the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, in all societies.

It is noteworthy that the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases focused on the developmental drawbacks and socio-economic impact on developing countries where the relevant facilities are not available. Indeed, we are of the opinion that the effective prevention and control of non-communicable diseases not only helps to reduce poverty but also decreases health-care costs, thereby improving productivity and ultimately helping with rapid economic development.

Efforts in Ghana to improve the health-care system include the completion of the health-care infrastructure in several parts of the country, the scaling-up of the National Ambulance Service to cover all districts and the training of emergency medical technicians. We have re-engineered our policies in order to give more meaning to health-care delivery.

Ghana recognizes and appreciates the contribution of youth to nation-building and the growth and sustenance of our democracy. We believe that the adoption of the political declaration urging Member States to adopt comprehensive plans and measures to give meaning to youth development is commendable, especially since this is the International Year of Youth. In Ghana we are implementing policies that are intended to situate young men and women in the centre of nation-building.

One of the main reasons for our relentless fight against drug trafficking is to ensure that we secure the future of our young men and women, who, after all,

will be the future leaders of our dear nations. As we continue to invest heavily in our youth by expanding educational opportunities and making it possible for the disadvantaged to have access to formal schooling, we believe we are laying the right foundation. The provision of free school uniforms, free exercise books and the elimination of more than one thousand schools under trees, turning them into brick-and-mortar structures, should be ample evidence of our determination to brighten the future of youth. Certainly Ghana's oil and gas find should present us with a greater opportunity to create the conditions under which we will be able to create more jobs to solve youth unemployment in our country.

Climate change is the defining human development challenge of the twenty-first century and one of the greatest threats to sustainable development in Africa. Although as a continent we contribute only 4 per cent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, we are the most vulnerable when it comes to climate change. Therefore urgent and concerted action is needed to enable us to maximize the opportunity that climate change offers.

We believe that with the right investments in technology, institutions and infrastructure by the international community and nation-States, we will be able to unleash the potential of agriculture, harness the maximum benefit from water resources, expand access to modern energy sources, fight diseases and conserve tropical forests.

As we move closer to the climate change negotiations scheduled for Durban, South Africa, it is our expectation that the critical political questions that could not be answered during the United Nations Climate Change Conference at Cancún will be addressed. With regard to mitigation, we believe that we need political commitment, a high sense of flexibility and strong leadership to ensure that at the Durban Conference the second round of commitments under the Kyoto Protocol will be addressed or some transitional arrangement made.

Again with regard to mitigation, we believe that all pledged commitments and actions should be quantified, monitored and verified by the international community. We commend the obvious progress made in the design of the institutions of adaptation, such as the Green Climate Fund. What remains to be done is to determine the sources of funding for the Fund and also to empower the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to have control over the Green Climate Fund.

On the political and security fronts, Ghana notices a paradigm shift, or at least a shift in emphasis, from national security to human security. We agree that interventions targeted on human security will eventually define our national security. We are therefore implementing measures that will help us make this concept take form through the adoption of the necessary legislative measures, institutions and reforms. We are taking steps to expand our adherence to the rule of law, the promotion of transparency and good governance, the maintenance of the independence and integrity of the judiciary, and the promotion of a free media. We also subscribe to the global norm of the responsibility to protect, and we promise to work hand in glove with member countries, the United Nations and others to achieve this.

A little over a year from now Ghana will be going to the polls to elect a President and Members of Parliament for another four years. To ensure that the elections are free, fair, transparent and credible, our Electoral Commission — which has successfully organized the last three elections, since the year 2000 — has put in place the necessary measures to enable Ghanaians to make their choices in a free atmosphere. Our democratic credentials stand tall, and we would not want anything to affect the standard that we have achieved.

Just as the United Nations and the rest of the international community kept an eye on the 2008 elections in Ghana, I should like to invite you, Mr. President, and all others to come and do the same in connection with the 2012 elections. We want to make sure that people are given the right to vote and choose their own leaders, instead of having leaders imposed on them or come in through unauthorized means.

Finally, I wish to reaffirm Ghana's total commitment to the aims, objectives and ideals of the United Nations. I also want to advocate that all Member States muster the necessary political will to ensure that the United Nations functions more effectively.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Ghana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. John Evans Atta Mills, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Talabani (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and our brothers, the people of Qatar, on your election to the presidency of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly. Our delegation will be of assistance to you in the performance of your duties, and we are confident that your experience and wisdom will be an important factor in the success of the Assembly's work. Our thanks also go to your predecessor, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his presidency of the General Assembly at its outgoing session. I should also like to warmly congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his appointment to a second term and wish him every success in his work.

It is an honour to stand in front of the Assembly one more time to brief members on the most notable developments that Iraq is witnessing as it works on building a modern State that lives in peace and security with its people and its neighbours. Iraq is building a homeland where everyone lives in peace and stability regardless of sectarian, ethnic or factional affiliations; a system where the rule of law prevails and human rights are respected; and a system that is based on democracy and the peaceful alternation of power. That is the basis for the path on which we have embarked and are continually implementing.

The events currently taking place in the Arab region have proved the rightness of the path that we have been following. The values of change and reform, which Iraq has called and will continue to call for, have become an essential part of the aspirations of the Arab people for freedom and for their ability to choose their own political system on the basis of democracy and human rights.

We have come a long way in building our political system, which is based on the National Collaboration Government. Iraq has started to restore the elements of strength that were lost due to more than three decades of internal and external wars conducted by the former dictatorship, due also to the international isolation and the sanctions that Iraq experienced and to the collapse of security institutions and outbreak of sectarian strife that threatened its national existence after the collapse of the former regime. We began to overcome these negative elements and they became history, thanks to our determination and steadfastness and with the help and support of the international community.

With regard to development, having witnessed the big improvement in security in Iraq, we are still relying on the five-year plan for the years 2010-2014 announced by the Iraqi Government on 4 April 2010 and on the licensing rounds held between Iraq and major companies on oil and natural gas investments to improve our oil industry. That was done to turn the wheels of development and push the economy to advanced levels.

It is expected that the five-year plan that has already started will include about 2,700 strategic projects in different sectors, with a cost of $186 billion. The plan would provide about four million job opportunities, which will positively deal with the unemployment problem in Iraq. It is hoped that by the end of this plan, the per capita income of Iraqi citizens will have increased to $8,000 annually and poverty levels will have decreased by 16 per cent.

In addition, we were able to get rid of the sanctions and restrictions imposed on Iraq as a result of the invasion of Kuwait. On the basis of Security Council resolutions 1956 (2010), 1957 (2010) and 1958 (2010), adopted on 15 December 2010, Iraq has been freed completely from all the restrictions imposed on it, which had prevented the country from taking advantage of scientific and technological advances, and has gained sovereignty over its financial resources.

After that important stage in building our State, we feel that we are taking firm steps on the road to democracy and development and that we are opening

the doors to investment in Iraq. Therefore, the economic policy of Iraq is essentially based on encouraging investment and providing the appropriate legislative environment to protect investors and their capital so that Iraq can become a safe and fertile investing environment in many essential sectors, such as oil, natural gas, electricity, reconstruction, infrastructure and other economic sectors. From this rostrum I call on all countries to open collaboration channels with Iraq in the field of investment and to take advantage of the available opportunities.

Iraqi Kurdistan has witnessed important developments in the fields of construction, the economy, the culture and others. Thousands of villages that were destroyed by the former regime have been rebuilt. Cities, towns and roadways have been modernized. The region now has more than 15 public and private universities with more than 100,000 students, compared to the past when there was only one university with a few thousand students.

At the end of this year the United States forces will withdraw, according to the agreement signed between the two countries in 2008. During this year, our security forces have shown a great ability to combat terrorism and provide security. These forces are capable and will efficiently fill the vacuum that the withdrawal of the United States forces will create. That will promote Iraqi national abilities to maintain the gains achieved in the new Iraq.

However, the need will push the Government of Iraq to keep numbers of American experts and others in order to benefit from their experience in the fields of training and capacity-building, according to Iraq's needs. On this occasion, on behalf of the Government and people of Iraq, I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to the United States, other friendly States and the United Nations that provided assistance and support to the Iraqi people and Government in order to enhance democracy and reconstruction.

I avail myself of the opportunity of being here in New York to express to the people of New York and to all Americans feelings of sympathy and solidarity on the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on 11 September.

Regarding Iraq's international and regional relations, the Constitution of Iraq and the national programme of the current Iraqi Government determine the general foundations for our foreign policy. They provide that Iraq is a founding and effective member of the League of Arab States and is committed to its Charter. Iraq is also a member of the Islamic world. On this basis Iraq is working to host the Arab summit at the end of March 2012.

Moreover, Iraq respects the principles of good neighbourliness and is committed to non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. It seeks to solve disputes by peaceful means, establishes its relations on the basis of common interests and reciprocity, and respects its international obligations. That is why we invite our two neighbours, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran, to resort to diplomacy and positive dialogue in order to solve the issues and to stop bombing Iraqi territories in the Kurdistan region, which is causing many innocent civilian victims. I avail myself of this opportunity to thank His Holiness Khamenei of the Islamic Republic of Iran for releasing the two American prisoners in Iran.

With regard to our obligations to disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, the Constitution of Iraq was clear in determining the position of Iraq concerning this issue. Article 9 E of the Iraqi Constitution provides that

> "The Iraqi Government shall respect and implement Iraq's international obligations regarding the non-proliferation, non-development, non-production, and non-use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and shall prohibit associated equipment, materiel, technologies, and delivery systems for use in the development, manufacture, production, and use of such weapons."

On this clear position and commitment of Iraq to international instruments concerning disarmament, the Security Council on 15 December 2010 adopted resolution 1957 (2010), which lifted all restrictions that were imposed on Iraq.

In this context we wish to confirm the legitimate right of States to the peaceful use of nuclear power and its technologies according to the rules and provisions of the relevant international conventions. This right constitutes one of the foundations of the disarmament system and non-proliferation. Within this approach and with regard to the nuclear issue concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran, we believe in the legitimate right of States to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. That right is guaranteed by international instruments, at

the forefront of which is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

We affirm the importance of reaching a peaceful solution in dealing with this issue. Dialogue and calm diplomacy are the best means to achieve that goal. On the other hand, any escalation will prejudice the interests of all parties and will put the security of the region at great risk.

Iraq is concerned about the tragic situation of the brotherly Palestinian people as a result of Israeli practices, which are incompatible with international laws, customs and international humanitarian law. Iraq is doing everything in its power to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to obtain all their inalienable rights, in particular the right to establish an independent State in its homeland, with its capital in Jerusalem.

In this regard, Iraq endorses and supports the path embarked on by the Palestinian Authority to come to the United Nations to achieve full international recognition of a Palestinian State during the current session of the General Assembly. Iraq calls on the international community and all peace-loving forces to stand by the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle to achieve their goals and demands that the Israeli Government fully withdraw from all Arab territories occupied in 1967. That would essentially contribute to the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and bring a comprehensive and just peace to this vital region of the world.

Making the Middle East an area free of weapons of mass destruction is crucial to achieve peace, security and stability. That requires Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to put its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The countries of the Arab world are witnessing significant developments and unprecedented reforms and political changes, the effects of which will be reflected in the future of the whole region and will extend to areas beyond. Iraq, as an early actor in initiating this change, supports the struggle of the Arab people of the region to gain their freedom, choose their political systems and exercise their right to peaceful demonstrations and protests in the so-called Arab Spring. We hope that these changes will contribute to regional stability and security and avoid anything that might threaten the unity and sovereignty of the countries of the region or stir up strife or sectarian and ethnic conflicts.

In the area of international cooperation, Iraq will work to promote cooperation with all countries that stood with it and supported it in the stability of the ongoing political process, in strengthening it and in reconstruction. We refer here to the United States of America and to the European Union. When we mention these two parties we mention them not because they are the only ones that stood with Iraq, but because we are linked by mechanisms of action that should be implemented. There are many other friends who stood with us in the difficult times that we have experienced, and we will remember that favour and develop relations of cooperation with them.

After the withdrawal of the United States forces from Iraq by the end of this year, we will work to enhance and expand the scope of cooperation on the basis of the strategic framework agreement signed between the two countries in 2008. According to that agreement, relations will be for the long term and will cover all aspects of life.

The same is true for the European Union. After finishing the drafting of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Iraq and the European Union and its possible signing in the near future, and signing a memorandum of understanding on the strategic partnership in the field of energy between Iraq and the European Union, the cooperation between the two parties will take a broader scope in various fields covered by those agreements.

Our economic, commercial and political relations with the People's Republic of China are expanding and improving. Our relations with neighbouring Arab countries, India and Pakistan, are also constantly improving.

Regarding our relationship with the United Nations, we will continue an approach of constructive cooperation with all United Nations bodies, in the forefront of which are the Security Council and the Secretariat, and we will keep the commitments we have made.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the efforts by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Ad Melkert throughout his time in Iraq. I wish him and his family success and good

health. I welcome the new representative of the Secretary-General. We will continue to cooperate with him in a way that will enable him to carry out his task in accordance with Security Council resolution 1770 (2007) and subsequent resolutions.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq will receive all forms of support and assistance from us, in particular during the next phase, and we will do our utmost to provide the necessary protection for its staff and premises.

We look forward with confidence and optimism to the future. Iraq is an emerging democracy and a country brimming with a wealth of natural and human resources. We are working to make it an important factor in regional stability, security and prosperity and a living example of democracy, federalism and the voluntary coexistence of different ethnic and sectarian groups and communities.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Iraq for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Klaus: Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the very important post of the highest representative of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session.

A few days ago New York City and the entire world remembered the tenth anniversary of the tragic events of 11 September. I should like to use this opportunity to pay homage to all the victims and to the firefighters and other rescue workers who died in connection with the 2001 attacks. We should not forget them.

The main topic suggested for the sixty-sixth session — the mediation of disputes by peaceful means — is at the very core of the United Nations Charter, and I can assure members it is also at the core of the foreign policy principles of the country I have the privilege to represent, the Czech Republic.

Mr. Bowler (Malawi), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Nineteen years ago the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was negotiated peacefully from within, without any need for external mediation. Our experience tells us that if a solution to any country's aspirations to sovereignty and freedom, or a solution to a dispute among countries, is to be lasting and acceptable for the citizens of those countries, that solution must primarily come from within the region itself and from the negotiations of the countries concerned. In the same spirit, the Czech Republic is convinced, with regard to the most important issue of this session of the General Assembly, that it is necessary for the two sides in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute to find a way forward themselves.

I agree with President Obama that there is no shortcut to ending a conflict that has endured for decades. It requires that both sides take an innovative approach and overcome some old, inflexible and rigid schemes of thought. It requires both sides to negotiate and to find a balanced solution that will last. Such a solution cannot come through unilateral steps, neither those forced by the United Nations nor the steps taken by one side of the dispute only.

The Czech Republic successfully completed the transition from communism to democracy, and, based on that experience, we wish the countries of North Africa to make progress in the same direction. We know it is not an easy path. To remove several leading politicians is not the crucial aspect of the much-needed systemic change.

When the Iron Curtain fell in Europe more than 20 years ago, I used to talk about three mutually interconnected preconditions for successful transformation: a clear and transparent concept of where to go, a feasible strategy how to get there, and to be able to motivate the citizens of the country to

promote it. I still do not see these preconditions in some of the countries of North Africa.

By saying that, I want to stress that the systemic change cannot be agreed upon or prearranged at international conferences. It cannot be mediated or passively acquired as a foreign investment. It is a domestic task and a sequence of policies, not a once-for-all policy change.

There is something we can do, however. We can and should increase our efforts to cooperate with the countries of North Africa. We should not forget that there is a complementarity between freedom and trade. Our relations — and now I speak especially about us, the European Union member States — with the countries of North Africa should be based on free trade, which means on trade with a minimum of regulation and arbitrary standards. Prosperity in the countries of North Africa is a guarantee of stability and is also a precondition for preventing growing migration to the countries in Southern and Western Europe.

I should also like to mention another issue that I see as crucial, that of nuclear energy. I welcome the fact that the Secretary-General called for a special meeting on this topic. The Czech Republic pays the highest possible attention to nuclear safety and security and supports the further development of nuclear energy.

What happened in Japan in March this year was a serious natural catastrophe, and there are certainly lessons to be learned from it. The main lesson is obvious. Even coastal locations, which are seen as seismically stable for urban planning, can be affected by earthquakes far away under the sea. Nuclear power plants should be built in locations that are the least prone to damage by natural disasters. Yet after the tsunami hit the Fukushima power plant, some Governments decided not to build new nuclear power plants and some even to abandon nuclear energy as such.

Speaking for the Czech Republic, we consider that what happened in Fukushima did not by any means question the arguments for nuclear energy. These arguments are strong, economically rational and convincing. Nuclear power is a stable, legitimate and, in some countries, irreplaceable source of energy today.

Let me conclude by saying that the Czech Republic continues to support the much-needed reform of the Security Council. The world has changed considerably since the United Nations Charter was signed. New countries must take greater responsibility for this Organization and for its financing.

This year the Czech Republic holds the presidency of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, which supports projects in 177 countries. We support that Programme but want to stress that in order for developing countries to develop, all kinds of unnecessary barriers, standards, regulations and other constraints in the developed world must first be removed.

I wish the President every success in his office and assure him that the Czech Republic will continue to be an active Member of the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Czech Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Turkmenistan.

Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Berdimuhamedov (*spoke in Russian*): I sincerely greet all gathered here and offer congratulations on the opening of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly. I congratulate His Excellency Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his election as President of the General Assembly at this session and express confidence that the Assembly under his leadership will work successfully and fruitfully.

Allow me to convey my gratitude to Mr. Joseph Deiss, President at the sixty-fifth session, for his

effective activity in this post. In availing myself of this opportunity I should also like once again to congratulate Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment to the post of Secretary-General and wish him great success.

As in past years, this forum is the continuation of the process of forming suitable approaches to the complex phenomena of the modern world — in other words, a search for appropriate answers to questions having global significance. It becomes more and more evident that there is a demand for systemic measures based on a clear definition of goals, a vision of their possible implementation and a choice of effective international mechanisms.

Turkmenistan formulates these goals as follows: peace through development. Today these concepts cannot be considered separately. The direct connection between peace and development is exactly what opens wide possibilities for the consolidation of political will and the intellectual and material resources of the community of nations. That is important in order to establish sustainable, stable and, at the same time, flexible and balanced modern systems of international ties in politics, economics and in the humanitarian sphere.

We are convinced that this large-scale issue and the responsibility for its implementation lie first and foremost with the United Nations. Turkmenistan acts accordingly in forming its approaches to the issues of achieving a firm peace and security, implementing the development goals and realizing humanitarian cooperation.

Considering that a fundamental condition for ensuring long-term peace and strategic stability is to efficiently abide by the United Nations Charter, Turkmenistan pursues a steady and purposeful policy of peace and good-neighbourliness and actively encourages peaceful processes. We absolutely reject military force as an instrument of foreign policy and intergovernmental relations. We believe that solutions through armed force do not offer prospects for success, do not eliminate sources of and reasons for clashes or contradictions, and in most cases do not create conditions for supplying appropriate answers to many questions that arise in post-conflict periods.

Turkmenistan attaches paramount importance to the settlement of any situation by peaceful means and methods. In that connection and in compliance with the fundamental documents of the United Nations, we suggest that at this session the Assembly start to develop a declaration on the critical introduction of political and diplomatic tools for the resolution of international issues, with further consideration at subsequent sessions. To our way of thinking, adopting such a declaration would allow for a considerable decrease in the probability of the use of force to resolve clashes in intergovernmental relations. It would help to reduce the risks concerned and threats to general stability and security.

At the regional level, we have proposed a number of initiatives on maintaining peace and stability in Central Asia and in the Caspian basin. These initiatives were welcomed positively. In our opinion, the next step must be taken, namely, to arrange a representative forum on security in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region. Turkmenistan suggests hosting this event next year. We believe that the establishment of an advisory council on peaceful development in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region may emerge as one of the political outcomes of that forum.

In talking of the necessity to ensure security on a global scale, we do not mean only its political component. Global security is considered as a comprehensive whole, based on indivisibility and a whole range of key factors that define the vectors of today's worldwide development. That involves the solution of economic, energy, ecological, food and humanitarian issues.

Today it is obvious that global security cannot be provided unless peace and consent at national and regional levels are reached. Therefore Turkmenistan aims its efforts at the maximum promotion of the processes of sustainable development, attaining the Millennium Development Goals and creating efficient models of multilateral reciprocal action for the solution of urgent international issues.

A reliable and stable transit of energy resources on the international market is one of the issues at hand. Our proposals on the matter received support from the world community and were reflected in General Assembly resolution 63/210, adopted in 2008. I believe that the time has come to start developing concrete measures on the resolution of energy transport issues.

With a view to joining the efforts of the Member States that are taking an active part in the development of an international legal foundation in the sphere of

energy supply, Turkmenistan considers it appropriate to create a new mechanism, transparent and open to all: an interregional energy dialogue under the aegis of the United Nations, supposing that the Organization would actively promote establishment of an essential format of cooperation. We see the States of Central and South Asia, the Caspian, the Black Sea and Baltic regions, Russia, China, the European Union and the countries of the Middle and Near East — all States, companies and international financial institutions concerned — being among its participants. The acknowledgment by United Nations Member States of the general nature of the long-term goals of development and a readiness to achieve their implementation jointly act today as determining factors for the sustainability of the global economic system.

The serious effects of the worldwide financial and economic crisis have clearly demonstrated once again the need to unite efforts to form viable models and realistic plans, taking account of the interests and needs of all States of the world. Turkmenistan will take an active part in this process and will contribute to the exchange of successful experiences gained by our country on a number of fronts involving economic and social development.

We are ready to do this through the relevant United Nations structures, first of all the Economic and Social Council. Our country submits its candidature for membership in that authoritative body for the term of 2013-2015. We are preparing for the work in this body, and, if elected, Turkmenistan will spare no efforts to successfully implement the tasks entrusted.

Turkmenistan will also take part in the Rio+20 Earth Summit in 2012. We see it as a landmark event in the process of making progress towards sustainable development objectives. We intend to announce a number of specific proposals at that forum.

With regard to maintaining sustainable economic growth, I should like to dwell on a crucial component, namely, the creation of a modern transport infrastructure.

Over the years our country, together with partners in the region, has been actively working on the implementation of major projects to optimize traffic flow in the Eurasian sphere. We believe this is a very promising area, given the huge potential of the north-south and east-west corridors. It is important that those corridors, which could give a powerful impetus to economic development and trade relations on a continental scale, be used effectively. We believe that the United Nations could play an important role in coordinating the establishment of international cooperation in the field of transport.

In that regard, Turkmenistan suggests that there be an initiative, during the current session, to start developing a United Nations special programme on the development of transport, including the study of transit and transport opportunities between the Caspian and Black Seas and between Central Asia and the Middle East.

Turkmenistan sees the environmental sphere as a key area for international cooperation. We respect the initiatives and decisions taken at the summits on climate change in Copenhagen and Cancun. We are looking forward to continuing a constructive international dialogue on this issue in November this year at the meeting in Durban. We are convinced of the need to join efforts in this field at the global, regional and national levels and to coordinate the actions of each United Nations Member State. In that connection I should like to emphasize that Turkmenistan is currently preparing an extensive document, the National Strategy on Climate Change. After the adoption of the Strategy we will be ready to submit it to the relevant United Nations agencies as a contribution to our common work. We believe that it will be possible, during the current session and in the context of closer multilateral cooperation, to start establishing systemic machinery in this area. To that end, Turkmenistan proposes establishing a specialized institution — a United Nations interregional centre on development and issues related to climate change. We are willing to provide for its functioning with all the necessary infrastructure in the capital of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat.

A most important question that goes far beyond regional boundaries is the environment of the Caspian Sea. Here we are also convinced of the need to give specific content to international efforts to preserve the unique natural resources of the Caspian Sea. In that regard we propose organizing a Caspian environmental forum as a permanent body to deal with environmental issues in the Caspian basin, as well as to make appropriate proposals and recommendations.

Achieving sustainable development is directly related to the resolution of humanitarian issues, support

for natural human rights, and opportunities for individuals to achieve personal fulfilment and for people to lead valuable lives. In that regard our country will continue its cooperation with United Nations humanitarian bodies for further implementation of United Nations conventions in the field of human rights. As a permanent member of the Executive Committee of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Turkmenistan will actively promote the implementation of practical measures aimed at protecting and supporting refugees. We have found it useful, in working with UNHCR, to study our experience in granting citizenship to refugees and stateless persons and to organize, in that connection, an international meeting involving all stake-holders in Ashgabat in 2012.

The challenges facing the Organization are complex and ambitious, but they are realistic and achievable because we have a common goal, namely, to make the world a better, fairer and more humane place. We are united by common values and shared responsibility. We are united in our endeavour to move forward. We rely on the vast experience gained by the United Nations over the decades, as well as on the will, intellect and wisdom of the community of nations. All of this will determine the extent of our overall success. Today each country makes its own unique contribution to the development and progress of mankind. This opens up enormous opportunities for creating and implementing new ideas, for developing innovative models of cooperation to address key issues in modern times. Turkmenistan is ready to take an active part in this activity, firmly following a strategic course aimed at close and comprehensive cooperation with the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Turkmenistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena, President of the Republic of El Salvador

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena, President of the Republic of El Salvador, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Funes Cartagena (*spoke in Spanish*): This new session of the Assembly of the United Nations brings us together at what is no doubt an historic time of great importance, as has been said in one way or another by the various leaders who have preceded me at this rostrum. These are certainly critical times that should lead us to adopt an attitude that goes beyond addressing the specific questions of the moment, because this is a moment of change in the history of humankind. On the economic, social and geopolitical levels there are many signs indeed that show us that the world is changing and that the transition towards something new, even if still undefined, is already under way and will follow its course, whether we are able to understand it or not.

That is why our peoples desire political leadership that is able to respond to this time of uncertainty. Our societies demand of us that we be able, first of all, to understand and explain to them what is really going on. They also demand of us that we listen to their needs and satisfy those needs and, above all, that we reach a new international consensus in order to make that necessary qualitative global leap in order to achieve a planet of greater justice, stability and safety.

This is, therefore, an opportunity to reconsider our policies, to review and change paradigms that seem to be frozen, to renew the international debate and to be ambitious in our aspirations as a global society. Members know that nothing undermines the morale and spirit of our peoples more than fear, uncertainty and distrust. It is those evils that are affecting our planet currently. We are suffering from fear in its various guises. Millions of demoralized, unemployed people live in daily uncertainty, not knowing whether there is a future for them and their children. Entire countries have seen their economies stumble because of that lack of confidence. Hundreds of thousands of families every day face the fear that takes the form of political instability, natural disasters, the lack of urban

safety, and poverty. All those people demand that their leaders give them the inspiration to overcome that fear, to regain a sense of collective self-esteem and to believe in a different and better future. That is the great historical challenge that we must shoulder with responsibility and courage.

We must forge a new international agreement that will allow us to overcome such fears and lack of confidence in order once again to stride forward. Therefore we must not allow that fear to be translated into timid or cowardly political and economic decisions that would deprive us of an opportunity to undertake the changes that our people are calling for. We must not betray their historic will for transformation and development. It would be unpardonable, unforgivable, if we were to allow ourselves to be lulled by old political and economic dogma and continue repeating once again the same mistakes, while overwhelming majorities in every city, in every State, on every continent, have clearly expressed their desire for a new, audacious and creative policy.

Over the past 30 years, while the economy has grown exponentially, so has the root cause of many of our misfortunes, and here I am referring to injustice. Daily injustice has a most significant effect on our peoples. It affects their options for health, education and social development in very tangible ways. That inequality has disastrous consequences, which has been tried, tested and understood by some of the wealthiest entrepreneurs, who are in favour of paying more taxes, as they are aware that adopting any other position would sentence us to a harsh future, even for those living at ease.

The fight against poverty and inequality, as was recalled at the inaugural meeting of this session of the General Assembly by the President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, has proven to be the strongest economic policy in these difficult times. Therefore, it is time that we no longer see our future in terms of macroeconomic data but that we start to focus our political debate on our peoples' needs and on social justice, which is what the debate should always have focused on. Any other debate would be sterile and would only lead us away from the common objective that should govern all our policies, namely, the objective of the common good.

The unstable reality that we have experienced also takes the form of conflicts which, increasingly, call upon the indistinct arbiter, who goes by the name of the "international community" and which is represented here in the General Assembly better than anywhere else. In that regard I welcome the fact that one of the central themes of this session is the search for the peaceful settlement of conflicts and prevention strategies to cope with situations of instability. This shows us that the arbiter is growing stronger, as are the possibilities to prevent injustice and human rights abuses wherever they occur. The United Nations arose out of the global desire to avoid a new major conflict, and that spirit of peace and harmony must continue to guide us in our actions, even when the conflicts that we face currently are very different from the conflicts of the twentieth century. Indeed, we are living in a most diverse and complex world where there are no magical formulas or quick fixes but common responsibility, which is committed to finding new avenues for peacemaking and justice extending beyond our national borders.

That resolve must also translate into our quest for solutions to what is one of the oldest conflicts on this planet, and I am referring here to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As members know, my country recently decided to recognize the Palestinian State. This in no way seeks to undermine our good diplomatic relations with Israel. We are of the view that both peoples have the right and duty to coexist. Recognizing Palestine as a new State within the United Nations is, in my opinion, the right way to contribute to resolving the conflict. With this firm belief we support all diplomatic efforts that are aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement of this long-standing conflict. We firmly believe that dialogue is the only possible solution, and our actions have always been guided by that principle.

Now I should like to refer to the main enemy, not only of my country and Central America but of a large portion of the American continent. I am referring here, of course, to organized crime and drugs trafficking. As was rightly stated by President Calderón of Mexico following the terrible attack that occurred in a casino in Monterrey, we are facing a veritable phenomenon of terrorism that threatens the viability of our countries, has taken more lives than many wars, and which endangers the present and future of our peoples. Many Latin American countries represented here have become, against their will, true corridors for illegal trafficking, thus becoming nations increasingly affected by violence, with institutions that are

susceptible to corruption. Because of their poor economies of scale, their lack of development and the weakness of their productive machinery owing to widespread poverty and high levels of inequality, poor States are threatened by this new form of terrorism that has forged a strong economic network. All of the cartels that are operating in the Mesoamerican region — Mexico and Central America — possess more money and influence than our countries do.

It is true to say that we are the true victims of organized crime. It is our territories and peoples that suffer from this violence and who weep for their dead. These are not mere empty statements. Studies have shown that violence and crime are 100 per cent more likely in regions that facilitate illegal trafficking than anywhere else on the planet. Our countries are suffering as a result of this. El Salvador and all of Central America are undertaking significant efforts to deal with this fact but the figures are not on our side. We are speaking of a drug-trafficking route that moves $100 billion a year and which leads to the largest market in the world, as well as the largest consumer of these substances, the United States. Consider this: $100 billion across our territories along with a veritable arsenal of weapons to protect this amount. That means $100 billion dollars that can corrupt public and private officials, destroy our social fabric and leave behind them a daily wake of chaos and death.

How therefore can countries such as El Salvador with a gross domestic product of about $22 billion, or a country such as Honduras with roughly $15 billion, or Guatemala which barely reaches $40 billion, deal with this enemy? Not even a large country such as Mexico can successfully wage this battle on its own in dealing with this terrorist strength. It is not scepticism that leads me to speak this way but rather a sense of realism in keeping with the reality experienced by Central American peoples on a daily basis.

I wish to draw attention to this. The international community must understand that it is also affected by this problem. No nation on this planet is spared this problem. There are drug users in every nation in the world, who get their drugs from the criminal drug-trafficking networks. That means that the fight against organized crime is a common struggle and, in that regard, I wish to make a special and hopeful call upon the people and Government of the United States resolutely to lead us in this the good fight against drug-trafficking and organized crime. I believe that the Government of the United States must lead us in the struggle with great resolve. It must make the commitment and apply all its economic, human, technological and political resources in waging the struggle, which is indeed the harshest war to affect our continent.

The violence that is fuelled by drugs trafficking and by its machinery of death has taken more lives in Mesoamerica than conflicts that occur elsewhere on this planet. That is why I wish to draw attention to and invite all Members to focus on this shocking fact. We require the firm resolve of our great North American neighbour in order to strike the necessary blows to weaken and end this criminal phenomenon. Naturally, that does not mean that our countries will in any way shirk their share of the responsibility. We shall continue to strengthen our institutions, to reform our security forces, to strengthen our presence on the ground in order to protect our young people from criminal gangs. At the regional level we are working together and have undertaken significant steps in a common undertaking by sharing strategies and tasks with Mexico, Colombia and the United States.

Of course, these are truly difficult challenges that lie ahead. Many of these challenges were referred to by the President of Mexico — the fight against money-laundering, disarmament, crime prevention, an effective judiciary — and will require the reform of our judicial organs. Inevitably, organized crime has infiltrated the organs of the State, in particular the judiciary and the police forces. That is why we must wage a strong fight in order to clean up those institutions.

But the consumer countries, in this case chiefly the United States, are morally responsible in this struggle that must be seen not only as a criminal problem but also as a matter of public health. While drugs consumption and narcotics use grow, the business of drugs trafficking will remain powerful. In short, we call once again for North American leadership in this common struggle that we are waging alongside Mexico, Colombia and all of Central America.

Struggles such as these, which are being waged across the American continent, once again show how important it is to have a strong and united America. Unity is a necessary prerequisite in order to meet our common goals. Given this need, I now wish to refer to

the blockade against the Republic of Cuba. We believe that this blockade is an anachronism from a past page of history that we wish to turn once and for all. Essentially a blockade against Cuba is a step towards disunity. It is a stumbling block on the road of history that weakens us as a continent.

At the start of my statement I spoke of the leadership that our peoples expect from us in these difficult times, of the courage that we need in order to face the challenges that extend beyond our borders and also of this great opportunity before us now. Let us show that leadership, from the smallest country, such as my own, to the great Powers. Let us show an unequivocal will to achieve peace, social justice and the well-being of the men and women who place their faith in us, in particular in times such as these when crisis once again threatens our peoples. Let us not fail them once more. We should not favour those in power who triggered the crisis but rather the weakest, who are affected by it.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rajapaksa: It is with great pleasure that I congratulate His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser on his assumption of the presidency. I must also congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon warmly on his reappointment as Secretary-General and we look forward to working with him constructively.

As we gather here today, it is appropriate to reflect on the values and ideals that inspire the United Nations system. One of the principal attributes is the spirit of flexibility, which has always been a feature of the United Nations. We must acknowledge the need for that spirit of openness and adaptability today more than at any other time. That is because the foundations of the world order are being transformed dramatically and fundamentally. At the heart of those changes is the need to protect the smaller countries in the developing world and to advance their interests vigorously.

In the midst of uncertainty there are some things that must remain constant. They reflect our most cherished beliefs and convictions. Despite repeated references in this Assembly by many member countries to the right of the Palestinian people to a State of their own within secure borders, we still have not been able to make it a reality. It is a cause of profound disappointment that this has not yet happened. There is a window of opportunity now and we must make use of it before it is too late. It is time for decisive action rather than more discussion. That will be in the interest of the security and well-being of the entire region, including Israel.

The need for sustained support for the countries of the African continent at this critical time is also worthy of mention. It is important to remind ourselves that every country cherishes the values, traditions and deeply held religious convictions it has nurtured over the centuries. They cannot be diluted or distorted under the guise of human rights by the imposition of attitudes or approaches that are characteristics of alien cultures. If that were to be done, it would amount to a violation of human rights in a fundamental sense. It must also be pointed out that, even where sanctions are imposed, extreme care has to be taken to ensure that the people at large, men, women and children yet to be born, are not harmed by such action. I would also express once again my solidarity with the people of Cuba and wish them all success.

While the clash of ideas, opinions and values continues, we have clearly to recognize that dialogue, deliberation and consensus offer the only viable means for resolving differences. The might of powerful nations cannot prevail against justice and fair play. In the troubled times in which we live we can derive guidance from the wise words of Gautama the Buddha, who advised the Lichchhavi Princes, whose energies were being consumed by bitter disputes among them,

that the way forward consisted of meeting, discussing and departing in an atmosphere of amity and goodwill. That represents the essential spirit of the United Nations and is particularly relevant today.

The most significant challenge to stability and progress in the modern world is posed by the menace of terrorism. Recent experience the world over amply demonstrates that inconsistent standards and discriminatory approaches can unintentionally give a fresh lease of life to the forces of terror. An explicit and uniform response that refuses to recognize political shades of terrorism is required.

Terrorism presents a threat from which not even the wealthiest and most powerful nations are immune. It must be remembered also that terrorist groups frequently operate under the guise of front organizations. Conferring legitimacy on such organizations has had the inevitable effect of providing comfort and encouragement to the merchants of terror. As the leader of a nation that has paid a heavy price because of terrorism over a quarter of a century, I underline that we must firmly resolve to rid the world of terrorism. We need to have solid, practical action on the ground and send out our collective message on this issue loud and clear and universally.

The interests of the developing world need to be protected in another significant respect. It is vitally important to insist that the structures and procedures of multilateral organizations should be uniform and consistent and devoid of discrimination. My country has reason for concern at approaches tainted by an unacceptable degree of selectivity, which we brought to the notice of such organizations in recent weeks. The developing world must keep a vigil against such irregular modalities, which should be resisted through our collective strength. Today, after three decades of pain and anguish, Sri Lankans of all ethnicities, living in all parts of Sri Lanka, are free from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terror and no longer live in a state of fear. However, I am deeply mindful that the battle for peace is every bit as important and difficult as the struggle against terror. After the eradication of terrorism, my Government turned its undivided attention to building anew the foundations of a unified and vibrant nation, drawing upon the inherent strengths of our country and in particular the unique calibre of our human potential.

It is justifiable for us to be proud of our nation's achievements during the brief span of the 30 months since the beginning of the post-conflict phase. The resettlement of more than 95 per cent of the internally displaced persons, who constituted the largest number of civilians forcibly held by a terrorist group at any time, while continuing even today to clear the mines laid by terrorists in extensive areas, is an achievement of which we can be proud. Today in the Northern Province our armed forces are engaged in the development of the infrastructure that was destroyed by the terrorists during a period of three decades. Contrary to malicious propaganda the numbers of armed forces personnel present in the Northern Province has been kept at a minimal level. Revival of the economy has enhanced incomes and improved livelihoods. Ex-combatants and other cadres, after exposure to programmes of vocational training and counselling, have been reintegrated into society. The electoral process has been restored after decades, making possible the emergence of a democratic leadership.

These are among our valued accomplishments. The remarkable growth of 22 per cent of the economy of the Northern Province is a clear indication of the success achieved by the Government's initiatives with regard to development in that part of the country. The gross domestic product growth of the country has been consistent at 8 per cent, and unemployment is at a record low of 4.5 per cent. It is also worthy of mention that, in the assessment by the World Economic Forum in its *Global Competitiveness Report* for 2011-2012, Sri Lanka shows dramatic improvement, moving up to fifty-second from their rank of seventy-ninth over a span of two years. It is worthy of note that all these developments have taken place within the brief space of 30 months — an achievement all the more significant because of our strong emphasis on reconciliation. Important as economic development is, we have attached the highest priority to fostering the spirit of inclusivity and removing any remnants of bitterness from the hearts and minds of all our people. Over the past 30 months we have recruited 669 Tamil police officers, bringing the total number of Tamil officers to 1,143, while plans are afoot to recruit more this year and in the future. After more than two decades a census is being conducted in the Northern Province as part of the national census, to provide a firm basis for our initiatives.

As a result of these achievements, what we see in Sri Lanka today is a self-reliant nation with robust hopes for the future and a strong economy, strengthened by inward investment flows, unprecedented expansion of tourism, and significant growth in volume of international trade. With a view to consolidating these trends and leaving behind us the trauma of the past, we ask of the international community the hand of friendship and goodwill, based on an understanding of our nation's determination to confront with courage the challenge of a new era in our history. We ask our friends in distant lands to drop preconceived notions. We strongly believe in home-grown solutions for them to be sustainable. It is clearly impractical to conceive of universal remedies for problems that afflict our societies. My country, as it comes out of the darkness of the past three decades into the light and promise of the future, must be afforded the time and space to seek its destiny in accordance with the wishes of its people. That is in keeping with the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the whole body of international law that governs us.

A further consideration that the international community should take into account is the vulnerability of developing nations, and it should make provision by means of appropriate institutional arrangements for their protection. As I observed when inaugurating the fiftieth anniversary meeting of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization in Colombo three months ago, the dumping of commercial and industrial goods manufactured in developed countries imperils the economies of many Asian and African countries represented here.

In conclusion, let me say that the use of substantial subsidies by treasuries and reserve banks to support agricultural production in the developed world, and other forms of protectionism, cause a serious distortion in the interplay of market forces and greatly reduce the ability of farmers in many developing countries to access international markets for their export products on an equitable basis. The disproportionate pollution of the environment by industrialized countries and the resultant impact on global warming and climate change cannot be remedied with any semblance of justice by imposing harsh restraints on developing countries, which have contributed very little to aggravate the problem. These circumstances heighten the importance of social equity at the international level.

May the Noble Triple Gem bless you all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti.

Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Guelleh (*spoke in French*): Allow me to warmly congratulate the President on his accession to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. With his experience and expertise we are indeed assured of the successful conduct and outcome of our deliberations. I express my gratitude to his predecessor, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his efficiency and the excellent manner in which he guided our work throughout the sixty-fifth session. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

I also extend my warmest congratulations to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment. That is a token of the esteem that all States have for his outstanding leadership, especially in these turbulent times and the difficult international political situation. We appreciate his tireless efforts and commitment to serve the international community, and we pledge our full support in carrying out and promoting the fundamental values of the Charter.

Lastly, we are delighted at the long-awaited creation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which

announces the remarkable progress that has been made during the past century in the quest for gender equality and empowerment of women. Clearly, despite the great strides made in legal matters, it is still true that such progress is not always translated into reality. My Government has made strengthening women's rights and improving their lives absolute priorities, and I am committed to ensuring that our laws conform to international standards.

We are gathered here today in a global economic context that is more than worrying. This difficult world economic environment is indeed reflected in weak economies, declining growth, crippling debts and deficits and rising unemployment. The least developed countries are more severely affected by these crises. The Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held recently in Turkey, gave new impetus to global efforts to improve the fate of the most vulnerable nations. From this perspective I invite the international community to pay special attention to the unique situation of least developed countries and to provide more support in alleviating the growing burden of debt by assisting them to improve their production capacity and facilitating access to world markets on more favourable terms.

Coupled with the economic malaise, we are witnessing throughout the world increasing climatic disparities that range from one extreme to another. It is now very common for countries to be hit by floods followed by droughts, and by earthquakes, devastating hurricanes or tsunamis. The catastrophe that recently hit our Japanese friends testifies to nature's ferocity. The recurrence of these climate plagues shows us that we must better prepare ourselves and set up appropriate mitigation and adaptation measures.

In the Horn of Africa the uncertainties of the climate have long been a fact of life, as evidenced by the recurrent cycles of drought. The current crisis affecting my country is not sudden. We had already sounded the alarm in 2010, when the first warning signs appeared. Faced with this terrible scourge, the resilience of the region is strained, and emergency measures alone cannot meet the challenges now confronting us. Indeed, the situation we face today is the result of several years of drought that have decimated the herds of nomadic peoples and destroyed their meagre crops. People in rural areas are obviously the most affected, and we are doing our best to help them.

Our needs are immediate and urgent, and we are grateful to the friendly countries and international organizations that have assisted us in our efforts. However, given the endemic nature of the drought in our region, we need to go beyond reactive management and focus more on managing long-term preventative measures. In this context my country has established several infrastructure projects in agriculture, including the exploitation of arable lands in the neighbouring friendly countries of Ethiopia and the Sudan, and the River Awash water catchment project on the border with Ethiopia for times of floods.

The country most affected by this crisis remains Somalia, because the precarious security situation does not allow access to certain populations. Indeed, over the past two decades, Somalia has been a victim of the worst evils. It has been the victim of endless bloodshed, insecurity, instability and destruction. Until recently Al-Shabaab militia continued fighting in the capital, which made it all the more difficult to help the affected population. Today, thanks to the diligence and sacrifices of the Somali security forces and their colleagues from the African Union Mission in Somalia, Al-Shabaab militia have been pushed out of the capital, and that has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to drought victims.

As I was able to see for myself during my visit to Mogadishu last month, the guns have fallen silent, life has resumed its course and this year, for the first time since the armed conflict began in 1991, Somalis were able to celebrate Eid in peace. Numerous high-level officials have since visited the Somali capital, which had long been considered too dangerous.

This still-fragile but auspicious peace is an opportunity for the Somali people to rebuild their country. Thanks to the security situation, which is now under control in the capital, the Somali people and their leaders have before them an unprecedented opportunity to revive a lasting peace, to stop the interminable transition process and to move the country to a permanent governance by next year. Efforts have been made in this direction by the Transitional Government as well as by regional and international organizations. These have helped parties to reach an agreement that reflects the new political reality in Somalia, especially after the month of August 2011.

All these efforts should be applauded as a sign of the determination of the Somalis and of the international community to end the endless infighting and fruitless discussions within the Transitional Federal Institutions. In this regard the agreed road map represents a solemn commitment by the leaders of the Transitional Federal Institutions to the people of Somalia, the regional bodies and the international community as a whole.

The international community, for its part, must not lose sight of the obvious weaknesses of the Transitional Government and should endeavour to provide the necessary resources to build capacity. The Somali Government should take this opportunity to show determination, courage and leadership.

Beyond the rigours of the climate and problems they generate, the Horn of Africa is often associated with fratricidal wars. Indeed, at one point in its history each of our neighbours has been in a conflict situation. While Djibouti has spared no effort to maintain peace, in spite of ourselves we were unfortunately dragged into a border conflict with Eritrea in June 2008.

Since then, despite the best efforts of regional and international organizations and the adoption of Security Council resolutions 1862 (2009) and 1907 (2009), Eritrea refuses to answer us about the fate of 19 prisoners of war or even to acknowledge their existence. This remains a serious concern and a source of great sadness for my people and myself.

However, despite Eritrea's failure to comply with the clear requirements set forth in those resolutions, my Government and I remain convinced that mediation is the only way that will allow us to achieve a lasting peace. With this conviction in mind, my Government has accepted the efforts and goodwill of His Highness the Emir of Qatar. That led to the stationing of Qatari troops on the border between Djibouti and Eritrea and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Djibouti territory they had illegally occupied. For our part, we remain willing to cooperate fully with the sincere efforts of His Highness the Emir of Qatar, and we remain confident of the peaceful outcome of this mediation.

We will never stop believing in the virtues of dialogue and mediation, the only virtues that can enable our region to consolidate the gains of peace. The most recent example of such success is undoubtedly the birth of the new nation of South Sudan, once again demonstrating the ability of our peers to find a peaceful solution to a decades-old fratricidal conflict. Today, as the people of South Sudan take their first steps in the comity of nations, we want to assure them of our fraternal support. I am confident that they will resolve the outstanding issues peacefully.

Of course, we can only rejoice that a new Member has joined the Organization, but I could not mention the independence of South Sudan without recalling the situation that has prevailed in Palestine since 1947.

The very foundation of the United Nations consisted in fighting injustice and giving nations their sovereignty. Many countries here today, including mine, have at some point in their history found themselves here in search of independence. South Sudan became the 193rd Member State on 13 July. Palestine, for its part, continues to this day to live under occupation, which in this day and age is morally wrong and politically unsustainable.

We Africans know better than anyone the conditions in which colonized populations live. The fate experienced by the Palestinians for more than 60 years we have known, we have fought and we have overcome by obtaining the recognition of our peers. More than any other institution, for colonized peoples the United Nations represented hope: the hope for a better future, freed from the colonial yoke; the hope to live in one's own country, enjoying freedom and one's rights; the hope, above all, to regain dignity.

The time has come for us to give hope to our Palestinian brothers and sisters by recognizing their right to become a full-fledged State. It is time to end the siege, the poverty and the despair. History will remember, I hope, that on this day we decided to end the injustice and made the choice to finally give to Palestine a full place in the international community. History will especially remember that we have chosen not to disappoint the hopes of the fraternal people of Palestine.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ismaël Omar Guelleh, President and Head of Government of the Republic of Djibouti, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Namibia.

Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Pohamba: I wish to congratulate the President and his country, Qatar, on his election to the presidency of the Assembly at this session. With his wisdom and experience, I am confident that he will successfully steer the proceedings of the Assembly. I assure him of my delegation's cooperation and support. I also congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his reappointment as Secretary-General.

I commend the President for choosing the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means as the theme for this debate. The peaceful settlement of disputes, as provided for in Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter, is an important principle that the international community should uphold in seeking solutions to conflicts throughout the world.

Our Government recognizes the legitimacy of peaceful demands for democratic changes in sister countries such as Tunisia and Egypt. However, we believe that the demands for democratic change should be locally driven. They should not be used as a pretext to undermine the fundamental principle of sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of independent States.

We are concerned that all efforts by the African Union to find a peaceful negotiated solution in Libya were ignored and undermined. Never in the history of the United Nations has the sanctity of the principle of non-intervention been so compromised as we have witnessed recently in Libya. The military intervention by a foreign Power reminds Africa of the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884, when Africa was carved up by imperial Powers.

In the aftermath of the recent political changes in some African countries, it is important to underscore the need to promote genuine national reconciliation and unity and to begin urgently to address the challenges of poverty and unemployment, especially among the youth of the world. Respect for justice, fundamental human rights, the rule of law and good governance should be preconditions for lasting peace.

Following successful negotiations, the Republic of South Sudan attained its independence on 9 July 2011. This demonstrated the statesmanship and wisdom of the leaders of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, who chose the path of peace and mediation. We call on the two countries to resolve all outstanding issues through peaceful means. I wish His Excellency President Salva Kiir Mayardit success as he leads the people of South Sudan in building a united and prosperous nation.

Namibia calls for the immediate implementation of the United Nations settlement plan and relevant United Nations resolutions calling for the holding of a free and fair referendum in Western Sahara.

With regard to Palestine, I reaffirm our full and unequivocal support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve their inalienable right to self-determination and national independence. Namibia supports the admission of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member.

The overwhelming majority of the Member States of the Assembly have for many years expressed serious concern over the continuing economic, commercial and financial embargo against the Republic of Cuba. Namibia calls for the immediate and unconditional lifting of this embargo.

Namibia welcomes the recent signing of the road map by the Malagasy political stakeholders with the facilitation of the Southern African Development Community mediator. It paves the way for bringing an end to the political crisis and returning Madagascar to constitutional order and democratic rule. The United Nations and the international community should provide adequate financial support to that country and become actively engaged in the ongoing mediation efforts to ensure the full implementation of the road map.

The people of Somalia are faced with not only political uncertainty but also a severe drought and famine, which have resulted in a human catastrophe. Namibia has joined the international community in contributing food supplies to the people of Somalia as part of the international effort to address the crisis.

The effects of climate change are real and are acutely felt in every part of the globe. For the past three consecutive years Namibia has experienced devastating floods, which negatively impacted our development plans. I take this opportunity to once again thank members of the international community who responded to our emergency appeal for assistance.

Now more than ever before, all Member States should work towards the successful conclusion of the seventeenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will take place in Durban, South Africa, later this year. This should set the tone for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, to be held in Rio de Janeiro next year.

The reform of the United Nations system, especially the Security Council, has been painfully slow. I underscore Namibia's firm conviction that a reformed Security Council should be democratic, representative and transparent in its working methods. That is consistent with the African common position. It is incumbent on all Member States to work together to strengthen the Organization in order to guarantee international peace and security and to advance sustainable economic and social development for a fairer and more just world for all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Namibia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Salva Kiir, President of the Republic of South Sudan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of South Sudan.

Mr. Salva Kiir, President of the Republic of South Sudan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Salva Kiir, President of the Republic of South Sudan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kiir: Allow me first to congratulate Mr. Al-Nasser on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this sixty-sixth session. We wish him every success during his term of office. In the same way, we congratulate the Secretary-General on having been re-elected to a second term because of the confidence he has won from the people of the United Nations.

I have not been involved in global issues, being the representative of the youngest nation in this family of nations. Our country is just two months and 14 days old today. Members can see how many problems and challenges are ahead of us. I wish at the outset to avail myself of this opportunity and the privilege of addressing this stellar gathering to reiterate, on my own behalf and on behalf of the people of the Republic of South Sudan, our most sincere and profound gratitude to the entire international community for the warmth with which our State has been welcomed into the community of nations. My people back home in South Sudan, and I personally here in New York, regard this significant moment as yet another milestone on the long list of our achievements.

The President returned to the Chair.

I should like to seize this opportunity also once again to salute the many who stood with us during our long struggle. We are indebted to many friends in this great Hall, without whose efforts it would not have been easy for us to get where we are today. We owe a debt of gratitude to the countries of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the troika States, and the friends and partners of IGAD, who waged a struggle for peace for the Sudan that culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. As an emergent nation that has been embroiled in conflict during different periods of time, all of which add up to more than five decades, the Republic of South Sudan stands in dire need of all the help it can get.

In most post-conflict situations, nations would normally expect to rebuild. That is not the case for us. Even before the ravages of war set in, our country had nothing worth rebuilding. Hence, we characterize our

post-conflict mission as one of construction rather than reconstruction, and we therefore hope that the overwhelming outpouring of support and sympathy that greeted our independence from all corners of the globe will translate into tangible development assistance for South Sudan. Our march out of the abyss of poverty and deprivation into the realm of progress and prosperity is going to be a long one, and that is why we need members to partner us on this difficult journey.

Although nature has endowed our country with some resources, notably oil and other mineral wealth, we hardly produce anything for ourselves — at least not yet. We are determined to diversify the economy of our country and lessen our precarious and near total dependence on oil. Our strategy is to use the oil as a catalyst to unlock the potential we have in other areas, especially in agriculture.

Oil is a non-renewable resource that will inevitably be depleted at some point in the future, but we know that the land, water and human resources at our disposal will continue to be our country's true, inexhaustible fount of wealth. The ambition of the people of South Sudan is to be able to transform their country into a regional agro-industrial powerhouse, but without a helping hand from others the attainment of this goal will indeed remain a tall order. Much as we need external assistance, it is our passionate wish that it be offered on terms that will also respect our political and economic choices.

The Republic of South Sudan is under no illusion that economic development and prosperity can be achieved in the absence of a climate of peace and stability. We shall therefore strive to promote peace and harmony not only internally but also between all of our neighbours and us. Inside South Sudan, we have set up broad-based executive and legislative organs of Government that are inclusive of key political parties. We did so despite the fact that our party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, won a landslide in the recent elections.

We were not deterred from installing such an accommodative Government by the fact that we do not even yet have in place the requisite legal framework governing political party activity. We took those steps not only because of our commitment to political pluralism, but primarily because of our strong conviction that measures of inclusion such as these can foster peace and harmony.

In the external domain, we remain strongly committed to maintaining peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with all States, and particularly with our neighbours. In that regard, I wish to affirm that the Republic of South Sudan fully adheres to the principle of absolute respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States, including the Republic of the Sudan. Therefore, the Republic of South Sudan hereby categorically restates that it has not interfered and will not interfere in any domestic conflict situation in the Republic of the Sudan.

However, on account of the fact that conflict areas in the Republic of the Sudan border our country and that any spillover effects from those could negatively impact our own security, we urge the Government of the Sudan to seek a peaceful resolution to those conflicts. We would like to emphasize in particular that the reinstatement by the Government of the Sudan of the recent Addis Ababa framework accord on the situation in Southern Kordofan State and political relations between the Government and the opposition could go a long way towards promoting the restoration of peace in the areas bordering South Sudan.

There are a number of outstanding issues that have carried over from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We hope to expeditiously resolve them so as to ensure the complete normalization of relations between the two States and the start of a new era of a positive and mutually beneficial relationship that will be predicated on the commonalities shared by the people of the two States. We therefore urge the Government of the Republic of the Sudan to consent to the speedy demarcation of the border between the two States, with the help of the international community. We hope that Khartoum will no longer object to such an arrangement, given that South Sudan is now a sovereign State.

We would also like to plead with the Government of the Republic of the Sudan to agree to the submission of our dispute over the ownership of a number of border areas to international arbitration. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan applauds the cooperation of the Government of the Republic of the Sudan in paving the way to the deployment of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei, and

hopes that the two countries will reach agreement sooner rather than later on the resolution of the Abyei issue, in line with the relevant provisions of the CPA.

On the economic front, South Sudan wishes to declare that it is willing and ready to outline serious negotiations with Khartoum. That will be done with the aim of reaching mutually acceptable arrangements that will guarantee for the Republic of the Sudan a fair income from the use of Sudan's oil export infrastructure.

In terms of governance, we have moved to rectify some of the defects in our system by strengthening the pillars of good governance. A number of key bills — notable among which is a public financial management bill — are now making their way steadily through the legislative process. The passage of such laws will help promote accountability and transparency and ultimately curb corruption and the unwarranted loss of public revenue.

In conclusion, the new Republic of South Sudan vows to become an active member of the global family of nations, making its contribution to fostering world peace and prosperity for the benefit of all humankind.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of South Sudan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Salva Kiir, President of the Republic of South Sudan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Armenia.

Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sargsyan (*spoke in Armenian; interpretation into English provided by the delegation*): I would first like to thank and wish every success to Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, and to thank Mr. Deiss of Switzerland for his leadership during the sixty-fifth session. I would also like to take this opportunity to once again congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on his appointment to a second term in office.

I would like to acknowledge the importance of the choice of theme for this general debate, and to highlight the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means and as a way of preventing the resumption of hostilities.

We greatly appreciate the mediation efforts of global and regional entities and organizations in various parts of the world to preserve peace and security and to settle conflicts through peaceful negotiations. Particularly worth mentioning is the engagement of regional organizations, which have gained a great deal of experience in mediation and have in-depth knowledge of political, cultural and military realities on the ground. The success of mediation hinges, among other things, on the articulation of a clearly defined mandate. A case in point for us has been the role of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in settling the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Another key factor worth highlighting here is the role of mediators in preventing the escalation of conflict and a resumption of hostilities. This aspect of mediation is sometimes overlooked, yet it is of no less importance to international peace and stability than is finding a solution to a contentious matter.

Three years ago, when I had the honour to speak from this rostrum (see A/63/PV.9), I said that the time had come for serious consideration of people's right to self-determination in the twenty-first century. Today, we are witnessing new instances of people exercising this inalienable right. In that context, I would like to congratulate the newly elected 193rd Member of the United Nations, the Republic of South Sudan. Its road to a seat in this Hall has been long and difficult, but the people of South Sudan, through the free expression of their will, have exercised their right to live as a sovereign, independent nation, thus pursuing the path that many of the Member States represented here today have taken.

The people of Nagorno Karabakh made the same choice two decades ago by exercising their right to

self-determination, withstanding the war unleashed by Azerbaijan, and surviving bloodshed to earn their right to live in freedom. The Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement talks are continuing with the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs. We are grateful to the co-chair countries and their leaders for their mediation efforts. However, it is the negotiating parties, not the mediators, who have to reach an agreement. Azerbaijan's utter unwillingness to reach an agreement and its everything-or-war position have stalled progress in the peace talks. Despite the expectations and high-level advice of the international community, Azerbaijan took yet another step backward during the last meeting in Kazan by rejecting the previously formulated arrangement and in fact trying to make the negotiation process break down.

Baku has turned Armenophobia into State propaganda at a level that is way beyond dangerous. That is not just our view; the alarm has also been sounded by international entities specializing in combating racism and intolerance. Even more dangerously, Armenophobic ideas are spreading among the young Azeri generation, imperilling the future of peaceful coexistence. By denying and destroying all things Armenian, Baku stubbornly continues to disseminate false accusations against Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh and Armenians at all levels everywhere, including here, within the framework of the United Nations. Azerbaijan's propaganda machine continues to regularly bombard the international community and its domestic audience with horrendous lies about so-called Armenian brutality and the killing of children. These stories are fabricated and disseminated based on their authors' shallow yet painful logic, which posits that there are some people out there who will rise to the bait of this evil propaganda against Armenia and that it will thus serve a purpose.

In recent years, owing to the efforts of the Minsk Group co-chair countries, particularly direct mediation on the part of the President of the Russian Federation, a number of documents have been signed, including the Meindorf, Astrakhan and Sochi declarations, which have stressed the need to strengthen confidence-building measures between the parties. The signature of the President of Azerbaijan is also on those documents. Azerbaijan, however, continues to turn down repeated proposals from the international community concerning agreement on the non-use of force and the strengthening of confidence-building measures.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's belligerent rhetoric and threats of war have intensified, and ceasefire violations that continue to deprive innocent civilians of their lives have grown more frequent. All of this is orchestrated at the highest State level. The dangerous rise in manifestations of Armenophobia not only does not contribute to an atmosphere of trust in the region, but also leads to questions about Azerbaijan's understanding of the United Nations goals of tolerance and good-neighbourly coexistence. With such aspirations, it is impermissible and even dangerous to aspire to membership in the Security Council.

Yesterday, in the framework of the Assembly, alongside debates on some of the most vital and urgent issues of our time, a High-level meeting was convened yesterday on the tenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration, which reiterated the urgent need to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance. Unfortunately, these phenomena are familiar to us Armenians not only from the examples I mentioned earlier and not only from this century. As a nation that has survived genocide, the most extreme form of racism and xenophobia, we are morally obliged to act to prevent future genocides.

The elimination of racism and xenophobia and the inculcation of tolerance can be truly effective if accompanied by a clear prescription of liability. Impunity and the avoidance of accountability give birth to yet new crimes. Hence, it is incumbent upon the international community to identify and denounce without delay any expression of intolerance, especially in its extreme forms.

The genocide of the Armenians perpetrated under the Ottoman Empire has been recognized and condemned by numerous countries, parliaments, international organizations and the community of genocide scholars. Unfortunately, the same does not hold true for the Republic of Turkey, which continues to engage in a policy of denying this atrocious crime against humanity.

We unequivocally welcome the clear position adopted by the international community in precluding any possibility of immunity or pardon for the perpetrators of genocide and other crimes against humanity. Without recognition and condemnation, it will be impossible to develop and implement effective

mechanisms of prevention, which is a United Nations priority. Armenia will contribute its utmost to the recognition, punishment and prevention of genocide.

These references to the Armenian genocide lead me to recall another important celebration marked this year: the 150th birthday of Fridtjof Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees. In the most difficult period for my nation, that great humanist rendered priceless support to the survival of the homeland-deprived fragments of the Armenian people who had fled the genocide. Holders of Nansen passports settled in various countries of the world. They rose to their feet and partook in the development of the countries and peoples that offered them refuge. I believe that justice and equal rights between States have become standards in international relations thanks to such powerful individuals, who promoted their vision of morality in the cruel world of realpolitik.

Speaking from this rostrum in 2008, I expressed the hope that the Armenia-Turkey normalization process initiated by us, the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the borders closed by Turkey, in violation of international law, would become the first steps towards the launch of a dialogue to overcome the climate of mistrust, suspicion and uncertainty between us. Although our initiative was commended and widely supported by the international community, Turkey has in all ways possible aborted the ratification and implementation of the protocols we signed in 2009.

Today, on the eve of the Rio United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, political will must be exerted to honour the international commitments to convert the South Caucasus into a region of cooperation and prosperity.

The correlation between security and development is not an abstract theory for our region, where economic cooperation and deeper integration with the global economy are hampered by unlawful blockades and the obstruction of regional integration projects. Those attitudes, alongside the fuelling of an arms race, not only pose a danger to the peoples of the region, but also continue to drain the resources direly needed for sustainable development.

The time has come for the leaders of the countries of our region to stand above the dictates of narrow political agendas and to move towards solutions aimed at a peaceful and prosperous future for generations to come. I want to believe that, in the not-too-distant future, our region will be perceived as a solid and firm bridge uniting civilizations, rather than as a dividing line.

Two days ago, the Republic of Armenia celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its independence. In September 1991, Armenia restored its independence, realizing the dream of the Armenian people and reuniting with the family of nations. In the realm of history, 20 years may seem like a short time, but for the current generation it has served as a time of great change, with the building of independent statehood and a renewed perception of its role and place in the world. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the States, peoples and individuals that have supported us in these 20 years of development and State-building.

Freedom, peace and democracy are our choice, and we are committed to this path. We are proud of our achievements today. In two decades, the Republic of Armenia has implemented a wide-scale programme of State-building. Much has been done in the fields of democratization, the protection of human rights, economic reform, and the establishment of the rule of law and a liberal economy. We have achieved much, but much remains to be done. Above all, we are convinced that we are on the right path — a path that is irreversible.

Exactly a decade ago, New York, the city that is home to the United Nations, experienced one of the worst atrocities in the history of humankind — the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Armenia unconditionally supports and actively contributes to the international community's counter-terrorism efforts and all the initiatives of the United Nations in this area. We are doing and will continue to do our best to make the world a safer and more peaceful place.

We stand ready, to the best of our abilities, to contribute to global security and respond to global threats, be it through peacekeeping missions, the elimination of the consequences of natural disasters, environmental protection or the fight against terrorism, racism and intolerance. Over the years, we have proven our aspirations and determination with deeds, and we stand ready to continue doing the same.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Armenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I have great pleasure in welcoming Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Abbas (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I extend my congratulations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly for this session. I wish you every success.

Today, on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian people, I extend my sincere congratulations to the Government and the people of South Sudan on their deserved admission as a full Member of the United Nations. We wish them progress and prosperity.

I also congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his election for a new term at the helm of the United Nations. This renewal of trust reflects the world's appreciation for his efforts, which have strengthened the role of the Organization.

The question of Palestine is intricately linked with the United Nations through the resolutions adopted by its various organs and agencies and through the essential and lauded role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA embodies the international responsibility with regard to the plight of Palestine's refugees, who are the victims of Al-Nakba, the catastrophe that occurred in 1948.

We aspire to and seek a greater and more effective role for the United Nations in working to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in our region, one that ensures the inalienable, legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people as defined by the resolutions of international legitimacy and as embodied by the United Nations.

A year ago, on this same occasion and in this same Hall, many leaders and heads of delegations addressed the stalled peace efforts in our region. Everyone had high hopes for a new round of final status negotiations, which had begun in early September in Washington under the direct auspices of President Obama and with participation of the Quartet, Egypt and Jordan, to reach a peace agreement within one year. We entered those negotiations with open hearts and attentive ears and sincere intentions. We were ready with our documents, files, papers and proposals. But the negotiations broke down just weeks after they were launched.

After that, we did not give up and did not cease our efforts to craft initiatives and make contacts. Over the past year, we did not leave a door to be knocked on or a channel to be tested or a path to be taken. We did not ignore any formal or informal party of influence and stature that could be addressed. We considered positively the various ideas and proposals and initiatives presented by many countries and parties. But all of those sincere efforts and endeavours by international parties were repeatedly smashed against the rocks of the positions of the Israeli Government, which quickly dashed the hopes raised by the launch of negotiations last September.

The core issue here is that the Israeli Government refuses to commit to terms of reference for the negotiations that are based on international law and United Nations resolutions, and that it frantically continues to intensify the building of settlements on the territory of the future State of Palestine.

Settlement activities embody the core of the policy of colonial military occupation of the land of the Palestinian people and all of the brutality, aggression and racial discrimination against our people that that policy entails. The policy constitutes a breach of international humanitarian law and United Nations

resolutions. It is the primary cause of the failure of the peace process, the collapse of dozens of opportunities and the burial of the great hopes that arose from the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel to achieve a just peace that would begin a new era for our region.

Reports by United Nations missions and by several Israeli civil institutions and societies convey a horrific picture of the size of the settlement campaign, which the Israeli Government does not hesitate to boast about and which it continues to execute through the systematic confiscation of Palestinian lands. It invites tenders for the construction of thousands of new settlement units in various areas of the West Bank, particularly in the Arab parts of Jerusalem. It accelerates construction of the apartheid separation Wall that is eating up large tracts of our land, dividing it into separate and isolated islands, destroying family life and communities and harming the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Palestinian families.

The occupying Power also continues to refuse to issue permits for our people to build in occupied East Jerusalem. At the same time, it intensifies its decades-long campaign of demolition and confiscation of homes, displacing Palestinian owners and residents under a multipronged policy of ethnic cleansing aimed at pushing Palestinians away from their ancestral homeland. Moreover, matters have reached the point where orders have been issued to deport elected representatives from their city of Jerusalem.

The occupying Power also continues to undertake excavations that threaten our Holy Places, and its military checkpoints prevent our citizens from gaining access to their mosques and churches. It continues to besiege the Holy City with a ring of settlements and a separation Wall imposed to separate the Holy City from the rest of the cities of Palestine. The occupation is racing against time to redraw the borders on our land according to what it wants and to impose a fait accompli on the ground that changes its realities and features and that is undermining the realistic potential for the establishment of the State of Palestine.

At the same time, the occupying Power continues to impose its strict blockade on the Gaza Strip and to target Palestinian civilians by assassinations, air strikes and artillery shelling. It persists with its war of aggression of three years ago on Gaza, which resulted then in the massive destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and mosques and thousands of martyrs and wounded. The occupying Power also continues its incursions into areas of the Palestinian National Authority through raids, arrests and killings at the checkpoints.

In recent years, the criminal actions of armed settler militias, who enjoy the special protection of the occupation army, have intensified. They have perpetrated frequent attacks against our people, targeting their homes, schools, universities, mosques, fields, crops and trees. Today they killed one Palestinian who was protesting peacefully. Despite our repeated warnings, the Israeli authorities have not acted to curb those attacks, and we hold them fully responsible for the crimes of the settlers.

Those are just a few examples of the policy of the Israeli settlement occupation. That policy is responsible for the repeated failure of the successive international attempts to salvage the peace process. The policy will destroy the chances of achieving a two-State solution, upon which there is an international consensus. Here I caution, and I caution aloud, that the settlement policy threatens also to undermine the structure of the Palestinian National Authority and even to end its existence.

In addition, we now face new conditions not previously imposed, conditions that will transform the raging conflict in our inflamed region into a religious conflict, one that will be a threat to the future of a million and a half Palestinians who are citizens of Israel. We reject that eventuality; it is impossible for us to accept being dragged into it.

All of those unilateral Israeli actions in our country are aimed at perpetuating the occupation. Israel has re-established the civil and military authority in the West Bank by a unilateral action, and its military authorities determine whether or not a Palestinian citizen has the right to reside in any part of the Palestinian territory. Israel is the entity that decides to confiscate our land and our water and to obstruct our movement and the movement of goods, and indeed our whole destiny. All of that is unilateral. Yet Israel complains of unilateralism — despite our agreements with it, which forbid unilateral individual actions.

In 1974, our leader the late Yasser Arafat came to this Hall and assured the members of the General Assembly of our affirmative pursuit for peace, urging

the United Nations to realize the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, stating: "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand." (*A/PV.2282, para. 82*)

In 1988, President Arafat again addressed the General Assembly, which convened in Geneva to hear him. There he submitted the Palestinian peace programme adopted by the Palestine National Council at its session held that year in Algeria. When we adopted that programme, we were taking a painful and very difficult step for all of us, especially those of us, including myself, who during the 1948 Al-Nakba were forced to leave their homes and their towns and villages, carrying only some of our belongings — along with our grief and our memories and the keys to our homes — to camps of exile and diaspora. That catastrophic exodus was one of the worst operations of uprooting, destruction and removal of a vibrant and cohesive society that had been contributing in a pioneering and leading way to the cultural, educational and economic renaissance of the Arab Middle East.

Still, because we believe in peace, because of our commitment to international legitimacy and because we had the courage to make difficult decisions for our people, and in the absence of absolute justice, we decided to adopt the path of relative justice, justice that is possible and could correct part of the grave historical injustice committed against our people. Thus, we agreed to establish the State of Palestine on only 22 per cent of the territory of historical Palestine — on all the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967. By taking that historic step, which was welcomed by the States of the world, we made a major concession in order to achieve a historic compromise that would allow peace to be made in the land of peace.

In the years that followed, from the Madrid Conference and the Washington negotiations leading to the Oslo agreement, which we signed 18 years ago in the White House garden and which was linked with the letters of mutual recognition — mutual recognition — between the PLO and Israel, we persevered and dealt positively and responsibly with all efforts aimed at the achievement of a lasting peace agreement. Yet, as we said earlier, every initiative, every conference, every new round of negotiations and every movement was shattered on the rock of the Israeli settlement expansion project.

On behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization — the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, which will remain so until the end of the conflict in all its aspects and until the resolution of all final status issues — I affirm the following points.

The goal of the Palestinian people is the realization of their inalienable national rights and of their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on all the land of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, which Israel occupied in the June 1967 war. This goal must be realized in conformity with the resolutions of international legitimacy and with the achievement of a just and agreed-upon solution to the Palestine refugee issue in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative. That Initiative presented the consensus Arab and Islamic vision to resolve the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and to achieve the just and comprehensive peace to which we are committed and are working towards.

We are committed to this. Achieving this much-desired peace also requires the release of political prisoners, prisoners of freedom and Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons without delay.

Secondly, the PLO and the Palestinian people are committed to renouncing violence and reject and condemn terrorism in all its forms, especially State terrorism, including terrorism by settlers. We also adhere to all agreements signed between the PLO and Israel.

Thirdly, we are committed to the option of negotiating a lasting solution to the conflict in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy. I affirm here that the Palestine Liberation Organization is ready to return immediately to the negotiating table on the basis of the adopted terms of reference and consistent with international legitimacy and a complete cessation of settlement activities.

Fourthly, our people will continue their popular peaceful resistance to the Israeli occupation, its settlement and apartheid policies, and its construction of the racist separation Wall, and they receive support for their resistance that is consistent with international humanitarian law and international conventions. They have the support of peace activists from Israel and around the world, reflecting an impressive, inspiring and courageous example of the strength of this defenceless people, armed only with their dreams,

courage, hope and slogans in the face of bullets, tanks, tear gas and bulldozers.

Fifthly, when we bring our plight and our case to this international forum, it is a confirmation of our reliance on the political and diplomatic option and is a confirmation of the fact that we do not undertake unilateral steps. Our efforts and moves are not aimed at isolating Israel or at delegitimizing it; rather, we want to gain legitimacy for the cause of the people of Palestine. We aim to delegitimize only the settlement activities, the occupation and apartheid and the logic of ruthless force, and we believe that all the countries of the world stand with us in this regard.

I am here to say on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestine Liberation Organization that we extend our hand to the Israeli Government and the Israeli people for peacemaking. I say to them: let us urgently build together a future for our children where they can enjoy freedom, security and prosperity. Let us build bridges of dialogue instead of checkpoints and walls of separation. Let us build cooperative relations based on parity, equity and friendship between two neighbouring States — Palestine and Israel — instead of policies based on occupation, settlement, war and elimination of the other.

Despite the unquestionable right of our people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State, as stipulated in international resolutions, we have accepted over the past few years to engage in what appeared to be a test of our worthiness, entitlement and eligibility. During the past two years, our national Authority has implemented a programme to build our State institutions. Despite the extraordinary situation and the obstacles imposed on us by Israel, a serious and extensive project was launched that has included the implementation of plans to enhance and advance the judiciary and the apparatus for the maintenance of order and security; the development of administrative, financial and oversight systems; the upgrading of the performance of institutions; and enhancing self-reliance to reduce the need for foreign aid.

With the support of brotherly Arab countries and donors from friendly countries, for which we are thankful, a number of large infrastructure projects have been implemented, focused on various aspects of services, with special attention to rural and marginalized areas. In the midst of this massive national project, we have been strengthening what we wish to be the features of our future State: the preservation of security for citizens and public order; the promotion of judicial authority and the rule of law; strengthening the role of women via legislation, laws and participation; ensuring the protection of public freedoms and strengthening the role of civil society institutions; and institutionalizing rules and regulations for ensuring accountability and transparency in the work of our ministries and departments; to entrenching the pillars of democracy as the basis of Palestinian political life.

When division struck the unity of our homeland, our people and our institutions, we were determined to adopt dialogue as a path to the restoration of our unity. We succeeded months ago in achieving national reconciliation, and we hope that its implementation will be accelerated in the coming weeks. The core pillar of this reconciliation involved turning to the people through legislative and presidential elections, to be conducted within a year, because the State we want is one characterized by the rule of law, the exercise of democracy, the protection of the freedoms and equality of all citizens without any discrimination, and the transfer of power through the ballot box.

We believe that the reports issued recently by the United Nations, the World Bank, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) and the International Monetary Fund have confirmed and lauded what has been accomplished, and have considered it an exceptional and unprecedented model. The consensus conclusion of the AHLC a few days ago here, in this very city, described what has been accomplished as a remarkable international success story and confirmed the full readiness of the Palestinian people and their institutions for the immediate independence of the State of Palestine. That was a testimonial from the international community.

I do not believe that anyone with even a shred of conscience could reject our application for full membership in the United Nations and our admission as an independent State.

It is no longer possible to redress the issue of the blocked horizon of the peace talks with the same means and methods that have been repeatedly tried and have proved unsuccessful in past years.

The crisis is far too deep to be neglected; it is far more dangerous and critical to simply be circumvented or to postpone its inevitable explosion. It is neither possible, nor practical nor acceptable to return to conducting business as usual, as if everything were fine. It is futile to go into negotiations without clear parameters, terms of reference, credibility or a specific timetable. Negotiations will be meaningless as long as the occupation army on the ground continues to entrench its occupation instead of rolling it back, and to change the demography of our country in order to create a new basis on which to alter the borders. That is totally unacceptable.

This is the moment of truth. Our people are waiting to hear the world's answer. Will it allow Israel to continue the last occupation in the world? We are the last people to remain under occupation. Will the world allow Israel to occupy us forever and to remain a State above the law and accountability? Will it allow Israel to continue rejecting the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice and the positions of the overwhelming majority of countries in the world? Is this acceptable?

The heart of the crisis in our region is very simple and clear. There are those who believe that we are an unnecessary people in the Middle East and those who believe that there is in fact a missing State that needs to be established immediately. I come before the General Assembly today from the Holy Land, the land of Palestine, the land of divine messages, ascension of the Prophet Muhammad and the birthplace of Jesus Christ, to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people, in the homeland and in the diaspora, and to say, after 63 years of suffering the ongoing Al-Nakba: enough, enough, enough.

It is time for the Palestinian people to gain their freedom and independence. The time has come to end the suffering and the plight of millions of Palestinian refugees in the homeland and the diaspora, some of whom have been forced to seek refuge more than once in different places of the world, to end their displacement, and to realize their rights.

At a time when the Arab peoples affirm their quest for democracy — in what is now called the Arab Spring — the time has also come for the Palestinian Spring, the time for independence. The time has come for our men, women and children to live normal lives; for them to be able to sleep without waiting for the worst that the next day might bring; for mothers to be assured that their children will return home without fear of being killed, arrested or humiliated; for students to be able to go to their schools and universities without checkpoints obstructing them.

The time has come for sick people to be able to reach hospitals normally, and for our farmers to be able to tend their rich soil without fear that the occupier will seize their land and water, which the separation wall prevents access to, and without fear of the settlers with their guard dogs who attack Palestinians. They build their settlements on our lands and uproot and burn olive trees that have existed in Palestine for hundreds of years. The time has come for the thousands of prisoners of conscience and freedom to be released from prisons and return to their families and their children and become a part of building their homeland, for the freedom of which they have sacrificed so much.

My people want to exercise their right to enjoy a normal life like the rest of humankind. They believe in what our great poet Mahmoud Darwish said: "Standing here, staying here, permanent here, eternal here, and we have one goal, one goal, one goal — to be. And we shall be."

We profoundly appreciate and value the positions of all the States that have supported our struggle and our rights and recognized the State of Palestine following the Declaration of Independence in 1988, as well as those that have recently recognized the State of Palestine and upgraded the level of Palestine's representation in their capitals. I also salute Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who spoke the truth a few days ago when he said that the Palestinian State should have been established years ago.

The General Assembly may rest assured that such support for our people is more valuable to them than anyone can imagine, for it makes them feel that someone is listening to their narrative and that their tragedy, the horrors of Al-Nakba and the occupation, under which they have suffered terribly, are not being ignored. It reinforces their hope and belief that justice is possible in this world. The loss of hope is the most ferocious enemy of peace, and despair is the strongest ally of extremism.

The time has come for my courageous and proud people, after decades of displacement, colonial occupation and ceaseless suffering, to live like other

peoples of the Earth, free in a sovereign and independent homeland.

Mr. President, I would like to inform you that, before delivering this statement, I, in my capacity as President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, submitted to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon an application for the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

I hold in my hands a copy of the application. I call upon the Secretary-General to expedite transmittal of our request to the Security Council, and I call upon the members of the Council to vote in favour of our full membership. I also appeal to the States that have not yet done so to recognize the State of Palestine.

The support of the countries of the world for our endeavour is a victory for rights, freedom, justice, law and international legitimacy. It will provide tremendous support for the peace option and enhance the negotiations' chances of success. The Assembly's assistance and support for the establishment of the State of Palestine and for its admission to the United Nations as a full Member State are the greatest contribution to peacemaking in the land of peace, and throughout the world.

I have come here today carrying a message from a courageous and proud people. Palestine is experiencing its rebirth. That is my message. May all the people of the world stand with the people of Palestine now as they march steadfastly to meet their appointment with history, freedom and independence. And I hope that we will not have long to wait.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Yoshihiko Noda, Prime Minister of Japan

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Japan.

Mr. Yoshihiko Noda, Prime Minister of Japan, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Yoshihiko Noda, Prime Minister of Japan, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Noda (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; English text provided by the delegation*): I would like to begin by congratulating Mr. Al-Nasser on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. I express my gratitude to Mr. Joseph Deiss for his devoted efforts during his tenure as President of the Assembly at the sixty-fifth session. I would also like to pay my deep respects to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his leadership.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

This has been a year of extraordinary challenges for Japan. A little more than six months have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake struck Japan. Nearly 20,000 people were killed or remain missing, and nearly 40,000 who were forced to evacuate continue to endure inconvenience in their daily lives. I am truly proud to see the noble spirit of the Japanese people manifest itself even amid such despair and hardship. At the same time, I have been deeply moved by the strong feelings of compassion shown by people the world over towards Japan. There are many unforgettable stories.

Ms. Rita Retnaningtyas, an Indonesian nurse candidate and trainee at the Miyagi Hospital, evacuated 120 patients from the hospital to a safer location just before the arrival of the tsunami. She stayed on at the hospital for several days, taking care of the patients in the absence of electricity and water.

In Brazil, the children of a small rural town collected change and sent their contributions to us in a tin can. I heard that, when asked why, one of the children answered that it was because Japan, a friend of Brazil, was suffering.

University students in Kenya gathered in Nairobi in memory of Japanese victims of the earthquake. They

sang in chorus the popular Japanese song known outside Japan as "Sukiyaki" — whose original Japanese title reads "Let Us Walk Looking Up" — saying that they wished to deliver the song to the Japanese people.

Those are only a few such stories among tens of thousands. The world expressed friendship, solidarity and praise for the Japanese people immediately after the earthquake. On behalf of the people of Japan, I express my heartfelt gratitude for the helping hands extended from all over the world. These bonds between Japan and the international community will be forever remembered by the Japanese.

Since 11 March, the sounds of recovery have echoed throughout the Tohoku region of Japan. The Government of Japan has exerted every effort to restore and reconstruct the disaster-affected areas. The daily lives of those outside the affected areas, including the metropolitan area of Tokyo, have returned almost to normal. The infrastructure and economy of the coastal areas of Tohoku, which were washed away by the tsunami, are recovering. Damaged supply chains are close to full restoration. We have been sharply reminded of the role that Japanese companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, play in sustaining the growth of the global economy.

We are making steady progress towards securing stable control of the situation at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power stations of the Tokyo Electric Power Company. Currently, we are focusing our efforts on moving up the existing target period to achieve cold shutdown status by the end of this year. A number of other challenges remain to be addressed, including the removal of debris and rebuilding of the livelihoods of the Japanese people in the affected areas. We will continue to be fully engaged in the restoration and reconstruction efforts as our highest priority task so that Japan's renewal can be realized without delay.

As the new leader of Japan, I am deeply honoured to discuss and share Japan's ambitions for the world's future, as well as Japan's diplomatic vision, with all those in attendance here today at this meeting of the General Assembly.

The world is undergoing tremendous changes, including those now under way in the Middle East and North Africa, which have been brought about by the peoples' awakening and their resulting common awareness.

Through its experience of the massive earthquake in March, Japan was again made aware of the importance of its bonds with the people of the world. We have come to fully realize the importance of the responsibility to society that is fulfilled by each individual. We have never felt more strongly the significance of promoting human security. I am resolved to implement Japanese diplomacy by working closely with all the world leaders here at the United Nations, with the determination to make a substantive contribution to overcoming the challenges that the world faces and shaping a brighter future for humanity.

Allow me to touch on Japan's efforts to help the world economy grow. Japan has a long history of assisting developing countries to create prosperous societies through nation-building and human-resource development. From our own experience, we understand very well that the engine of economic growth is a strong middle class. In order to strengthen that middle class, we must construct a social framework within which all individuals can strengthen their capacities and develop them to the full. In this regard, Japan will continue to actively support developing countries through its official development assistance.

We must not let the current global economic uncertainty and financial unrest hamper the efforts of the international community to achieve growth. It is vital that all countries cooperate in order to bring harmony out of the current chaos. I myself am committed to doing my best as the new leader of Japan. Achieving economic growth in tandem with fiscal health is the most crucial challenge confronting the world at the present time. Japan will press ahead with its targets for restoring fiscal sustainability. Meanwhile, as we recognize that revitalizing the Japanese economy is directly linked to rebuilding the world economy, we will work on strengthening industrial infrastructure, employment and energy conservation in our efforts to achieve a full recovery from the earthquake disaster. In the mid-to-long term, we intend to further reinforce partnerships between the Japanese and other global economies. It is also important that trade activities not be disturbed by excessive currency volatility.

Furthermore, in order to help realize sustainable growth of the Japanese economy, we will work to

achieve a low-carbon society and a transition to a green economy. The key to achieving these goals is technological innovation in the areas of renewable energies, saving energy and the clean use of fossil fuels, all of which are considered part of green innovation. By next summer, the Government of Japan will have created a new strategy and plan for the composition of Japan's mid- to long-term energy use, aimed at making a bold shift on energy policy. Japan will also further improve on its excellent, safe, secure and environmentally friendly technologies, represented by energy-efficient houses and electric appliances and vehicles, contributing to the growth of the global economy and to a brighter future for all during the discussions leading up to the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

Japan will throw all its efforts into seeking a safe and brighter future. The run-up height, which is the maximum onshore vertical height above sea level, of the tsunami that hit the Tohoku district reached as high as 40 metres, the highest in Japan in recorded history. We have learned that we must be very well prepared. In that regard, there are contributions that Japan, with such experience behind it, is uniquely qualified to make. The first lesson to be learned from Japan's recent tragedy is the importance of international cooperation in disaster risk reduction.

We have a long history of combating and overcoming natural disasters. In fact, we have actively supported the response efforts to the disasters that have occurred in recent years in areas such as Sumatra, Sichuan in China, Haiti and New Zealand. As a country that has learned to coexist harmoniously with nature, we are prepared to share with the world our accumulated knowledge and skills. As a first step, Japan will hold an international conference in the disaster-stricken Tohoku region next year designed to improve international cooperation on coping with natural disasters. To build on the outcome of that conference, Japan proposes to host the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015, and plans to take a leading role in the international community in creating a disaster-resistant world.

Next, Japan hopes to share its acquired knowledge and experience in the field of nuclear safety. I welcomed yesterday's high-level meeting on this issue held at the initiative of the Secretary-General. Following the nuclear accident, Japan has implemented emergency safety measures and further strengthened its nuclear energy regulation regime. In yesterday's meeting, I expressed my resolve to contribute positively to the reinforcement of global nuclear power safety, drawing on our experiences with the accident.

Next year, Japan will co-host an international conference with the International Atomic Energy Agency to share the results of the overall assessment of the accident in comprehensive detail, and to contribute to the various measures taken by the international community to raise standards for nuclear safety. Although some countries, regrettably, are still imposing undue restrictions on imports from Japan, our Government will continue to provide prompt, accurate and transparent information on this matter. I would request that all countries make sensible judgements based on scientific evidence.

Global threats continue to proliferate. It is essential to deal with the root causes of such threats while taking steps to address them. Japan will continue to respond to those challenges in order to ensure a brighter and more peaceful future. With regard to the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia, Japan will remain actively engaged in combating the problem through continued deployment to the area of two destroyers and two patrol aircraft.

Japan intends to enhance its efforts to eradicate terrorism and its causes. Though a decade has passed since the 9/11 attacks, our collective sorrow has yet to heal. And in that connection, I would like to express my sincere condolences on the death of Mr. Rabbani, Chairman of Afghanistan's High Peace Council. Japan reiterates its firm condemnation of such atrocious acts of terrorism. In order to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a breeding ground for terrorism, we will continue to confront the problem with strong resolve. Japan has expressed its commitment to providing approximately $5 billion in assistance over five years beginning in 2009, focusing on security, reintegrating former insurgents into society, and development, and will continue to implement that commitment.

United Nations peacekeeping missions are being dispatched to fragile and conflict-prone States. Japan will contribute to peacebuilding efforts by actively participating in those operations. We must further improve the conditions that promote that goal. At the

same time, we will do our best to achieve the ideal of a world without nuclear weapons through such efforts as the multi-country non-proliferation and disarmament initiative.

The nuclear and missile issues of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea pose a threat to the entire international community, and Japan continues to urge that country to take concrete steps towards resolving those issues. In particular, the abduction issue represents a violation of basic human rights. It is thus an issue of universal import and a matter of great concern for the entire international community. Japan is committed to exerting all possible efforts to achieve the return of all the victims at the earliest possible date, through strengthened coordination with other Member States.

With regard to relations between Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan intends to maintain its efforts to comprehensively resolve the outstanding issues of concern, settle the unfortunate past and normalize relations, in accordance with the Japan-Democratic People's Republic of Korea Pyongyang Declaration of 2007. Japan urges the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take positive steps in order that our countries may have a dialogue toward this goal.

In recent years, the role of the United Nations has taken on greater significance than ever. In order for the United Nations to tackle such issues more effectively, Japan will continue to support increasing effectiveness and efficiency in reinforcing the functions of the United Nations.

Security Council reform is absolutely necessary in that respect. We must revitalize the stagnated reform process. All Member States must proactively commit to the reform with a sense of urgency. The credibility of the United Nations is at stake. Japan intends to launch substantive negotiations toward the reform with like-minded Members, in order to achieve tangible results during the current session.

As I promised moments ago, Japan will recover from the earthquake disaster and seek a peaceful, safe and brighter future, side by side with the leaders gathered here. For that purpose, Japan will maintain its contribution to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, focusing on health and education. Moreover, Japan will continue its contribution to the development of Africa by hosting the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2013. Regarding the support intended to enable developing countries to address climate change, Japan will implement its quick-start finance commitments up to next year. Japan will continue its support beyond 2012.

Today, I would like to announce Japan's new commitments. First, I wish to congratulate the people of the Republic of South Sudan on achieving their independence, and provide assurances that Japan will extend wherever possible support for the nation-building efforts in South Sudan as well as for the consolidation of peace in the region. Japan is eager to contribute to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in the fields in which Japan excels. From this point of view, we are preparing to dispatch Japanese Self-Defence Forces personnel to Mission Headquarters as staff officers. Japan is also interested in dispatching an engineering unit of our Self-Defence Forces, regarding which the United Nations has expressed high expectations. Japan therefore will conduct the necessary field study as early as possible.

Second, Japan will remain actively involved in the international community's efforts with regard to humanitarian crises. One of the most pressing challenges at present is the drought in the Horn of Africa, which is directly affecting the children of the region. To mitigate this suffering as effectively as possible, Japan will provide further humanitarian aid in addition to the approximately $100 million in assistance that it has already implemented.

The last commitment I wish to announce concerns the Middle East and North Africa. Japan will support reform and democratization efforts in this region, which is now undergoing a massive change that is often referred to as the Arab Spring. To improve the employment situation and support human resources development in the region, Japan is prepared to extend an additional yen loan worth approximately $1 billion for projects that are expected to contribute to infrastructure building and industrial development.

Moreover, we will provide support to ensure fair elections in Tunisia and Egypt, where polls are scheduled to be held in autumn of this year. For a new Libya, Japan will support the country's nation-building efforts in cooperation with the international community, utilizing its expertise and technological capacity. At the same time, Japan will deepen

economic relations with Middle Eastern and North African countries by further promoting trade and investment through such means as trade insurance and export loans. As Middle East peace represents the linchpin for the peace and stability of the region, Japan will make active efforts, such as extending assistance to the Palestinians, for the realization of the two-State solution.

To conclude my statement, I will touch briefly upon what I have felt in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. After the events of 11 March this year, I strongly felt the magnificence of a society in which each individual undertakes actions in an orderly manner, a society in which people help each other. In addition, all lines of the Tohoku shinkansen bullet trains, including a train that was running at 270 kilometres per hour at the time of the earthquake, made emergency stops safely, without causing a single injury. I believe this fact bears witness to Japan's high level of technical advancement.

I thus believe in the strength of the Japanese people, which comes to the fore most prominently in times of crisis. I am certain that such resilience, both human and technological, which does not yield in the face of enormous difficulties, will be the very source of Japan's future contribution to the international community.

Let us take up the challenges for the resolution of the issues confronting the world today, with strong determination to pave the way to a brighter future for humanity. As the new leader of Japan, I am determined to make progress step by step towards a more peaceful, prosperous and positive future, hand in hand with the leaders assembled here today.

The people of Japan as well as the Government are determined to overcome any and all difficulties. We will continue our contribution towards a brighter future for the people of the world.

I wish to close my statement by reiterating our firm determination.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Japan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Yoshihiko Noda, the Prime Minister of Japan, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Thinley: My country is most happy to welcome South Sudan as a member of the United Nations family. I now seek the permission of the Members to speak on the subject of happiness.

Since joining the United Nations 41 years ago, Bhutan has always maintained a long-term and broad perspective on the purpose of this great Organization, which is to create a secure and harmonious society. But in the many times that I have participated in the United Nations General Assembly over the last 25 years, I cannot recall a session that gave me reason for hope for the future of humanity, except once. That was when the cold war came to a thundering halt, and a euphoric world saw it as the dawn of a new era. I was then a young ambassador excited by the prospects of peace dividends. Instead, what followed was a sense of betrayal and disillusionment, as the world became ever more divided and insecure.

We gather before this high podium, year after year, and make of this annual gathering a mournful event. We speak of what ought to be, of promises broken and opportunities lost. We speak of endless conflicts within and among nations, of the failures of Governments, of frequent and devastating disasters, of diminishing resources and fierce competition for their control, of dying ecosystems and new threatening diseases and epidemics, and of financial calamities and economic ruin. We speak of rising unemployment, hopeless poverty, hunger and destitution. And of course, we talk of solutions.

Lacking the political will and, indeed, clarity of vision, we deny with clever arguments what we know to be the cause of our predicaments. So we go on doing

what is irrational. We continue to acquire arms to prevent war; answer climate change with more harmful emissions; race to extract, produce and consume more in the face of depleting resources; fuel faltering economies with debt and greed; and enable the wealthy to widen the deep crevasses that separate the rich from the poor. We idealize individualism as family and community crumble amid rising social dislocation, crime, mental illness, loneliness and suicide.

For too long, we have ignored the truth that the causes of all those problems are interrelated and that durable remedies must be found through a rational and holistic approach. For too long, we have refused to accept that economic models focused on gross domestic product have served their useful purpose and that we need to switch tracks. Guided by the misbelief that life satisfaction is about material pursuit and accumulation and that good economics is about limitless growth, our economic development processes have created the monster of a consumerist market economy.

However, the market gives no satisfaction. It enslaves humanity and thrives on the insatiable nature of our greed. As slaves, our value as individuals and nations is measured by the extent of our economic productivity and consumption capacity. That sad transformation, from humans into voracious beasts, comes at the cost of our physical, psychological and spiritual well-being. It is destroying our natural life-support systems and threatening our long-term survival. But that need not be so.

Humankind is in need of a clear vision that transcends the diversity of our cultures, thoughts and circumstances and binds us to a common pursuit. We need a different development paradigm that is guided by a vision that is holistic, sustainable, inclusive and humane. Such a vision can take civilization forward and enable it to sustain the progress that it has created and must continue to make.

It is therefore with a great sense of joy that my country welcomed resolution 65/309, entitled "Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development". Introduced by Bhutan and sponsored by 68 Member States, it was adopted unanimously without a vote in July. Through that resolution, Member States adopted a universal goal, while acknowledging the limitations of our conventional development processes. It commits our nations to creating the necessary political, social and economic conditions to enable the pursuit of happiness by citizens within a stable environment.

My delegation is of the firm conviction that happiness or well-being, as it is promoted in my country, would be against a well-developed set of indices, a natural progression from the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to establish the minimum conditions for human survival and the basis for development. It is, indeed, a universal value that binds the rich and the poor, and the developed and the developing, and articulates the ultimate purpose of life. It is about making true societal progress in ways that are meaningful, joyful and lasting.

In that regard, I am happy to report that my Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the Earth Institute of Columbia University and leading scientists and thinkers on the science and economics of happiness, are working in concert to prepare the panel discussion stipulated by the resolution. Proposed to be held in New York in the spring of 2012 before the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the meeting will endeavour to present to Member States a set of policy recommendations in their pursuit of happiness as they work in harmonious collaboration with each other with a shared and clear sense of purpose. We look forward to Members' participation in that meeting.

My delegation remains fully committed to the promotion of a sustainable and progressive human civilization within a peaceful and secure environment. To that happy end, Bhutan is prepared to share its experience and the modest development achievements made with the support of our generous partners. Our attempts to promote equitable and sustainable social economic growth are bearing fruit within a rich biodiversity that includes a forest cover that has expanded from 64 per cent to 81 per cent in four decades. Today, Bhutan is the only country that has pledged to remain carbon neutral forever. Our social and cultural values remain vital, even as we embrace globalization and its many offerings. We have successfully and smoothly transited from an absolute monarchy to a fully fledged and vibrant democracy.

For those reasons and out of a sense of duty and obligation, my country aspires to serve as a non-permanent member on the Security Council for the biennium

2013-2014. Having been a member of the United Nations for 41 years and never having served on the Council, while having fully enjoyed the benefits of membership, we wish to contribute as a small State for small States. We believe that we can bring to the Security Council a fresh and holistic perspective on peace and security beyond its narrow confines and open it to new and innovative approaches to fulfilling its important mandate. My country is of the firm belief that maintaining peace and security is not only about preventing war. It is about recognizing and forging the will to deal with all forms of threat to the survival, progress and happiness of human society.

Yes, I speak of a dream, but it is possible. As leaders and representatives of our peoples, we must dare to dream and find the courage and determination to pursue the highest of ideals. That is how happiness is to be fashioned. Blessings and good luck!

My country prays for Members' support to give Bhutan an opportunity to contribute to the realization of shared dreams. I wish participants happiness.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of the State of Israel

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of the State of Israel, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of the State of Israel, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Netanyahu (Israel): Israel has extended its hand in peace from the moment it was established 63 years ago. On behalf of Israel and the Jewish people, I extend that hand again today. I extend it to the people of Egypt and Jordan, with renewed friendship for neighbours with whom we have made peace. I extend it to the people of Turkey, with respect and goodwill. I extend it to the people of Libya and Tunisia, with admiration for those trying to build a democratic future. I extend it to the other peoples of North Africa and the Arabian peninsula, with whom we want to forge a new beginning. I extend it to the people of Syria, Lebanon and Iran, with awe at the courage of those fighting brutal repression.

Most especially, I extend my hand to the Palestinian people, with whom we seek a just and lasting peace.

In Israel, our hope for peace never wanes. Our scientists, doctors and innovators apply their genius to improving the world of tomorrow. Our artists and our writers enrich the heritage of humanity. Now, I know that this is not exactly the image of Israel that is often portrayed in this Hall. After all, it was here in 1975 that the age-old yearning of my people to restore our national life in our ancient biblical homeland was branded, shamefully, as racism. It was right here in 1980 that the historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was not praised, but denounced. It is here, year after year, that Israel is unjustly singled out for condemnation. It is singled out for condemnation more often than all the nations of the world combined. Twenty-one out of 27 relevant General Assembly resolutions condemn Israel, the one true democracy in the Middle East.

This is an unfortunate part of the United Nations institution. It is the theatre of the absurd. It not only casts Israel as the villain, it often casts real villains in leading roles. Al-Qadhafi's Libya chaired the Commission on Human Rights. Saddam's Iraq headed the Conference on Disarmament.

One might say that is the past. Well, here is what is happening now — right now, today. Hizbullah-controlled Lebanon now presides over the Security Council. This means, in effect, that a terror organization presides over the body entrusted with guaranteeing the world's security. One could not make this up. Here in the United Nations, automatic majorities can decide anything. They can decide that the sun rises in the west. They can also decide — they have decided — that the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Judaism's holiest place, is occupied Palestinian territory.

Yet, even here in the General Assembly, the truth can sometimes break through. In 1984, when I was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, I

visited the great rabbi of Lubavitch. He said to me — and I do not want anyone here to be offended, because from personal experience of serving here, I know there are many honourable men and women, many capable and decent people, serving their nations here — but here is what the rebbe said to me. He said, "You will be serving in a house of many lies". And then he said, "Remember that, even in the darkest place, the light of a single candle can be seen far and wide". Today I hope that the light of truth will shine, if only for a few minutes, in a Hall that for too long has been a place of darkness for my country.

As Israel's Prime Minister, I did not come here to win applause. I came here to speak the truth. The truth is that Israel wants peace. The truth is that I want peace. The truth is that in the Middle East, at all times but especially during these turbulent days, peace must be anchored in security. The truth is that we can achieve peace not through United Nations resolutions, but only through direct negotiations between the parties. The truth is that so far the Palestinians have refused to negotiate. The truth is that Israel wants peace with a Palestinian State, but the Palestinians want a State without peace. The truth is that the Assembly should not let that happen.

When I first came here 27 years ago, the world was divided between East and West. Since then, the Cold War ended, great civilizations have risen from centuries of slumber, hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty, countless more are poised to follow, and the remarkable thing is that, so far, this monumental historic shift has largely occurred peacefully.

Yet a malignancy is now growing between East and West that threatens the peace of all. It seeks not to liberate, but to enslave; not to build, but to destroy. That malignancy is militant Islam. It cloaks itself in the mantle of a great faith, yet it murders Jews, Christians and Muslims alike with unforgiving impartiality. On 11 September 2001, it killed thousands of Americans and left the twin towers in smouldering ruins. Last night, I laid a wreath on the 9/11 memorial. It was deeply moving. However, as I was going there, one thing echoed in my mind: the outrageous words of the President of Iran at this rostrum yesterday. He implied that 9/11 was an American conspiracy. Some left this Hall; everyone should have.

Since 9/11, militant Islamists have slaughtered countless other innocents in London and Madrid, in Baghdad and Mumbai, in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and in every part of Israel. I believe that the greatest danger facing our world is that this fanaticism will arm itself with nuclear weapons, and that is precisely what Iran is trying to do. Can we imagine that man who ranted here yesterday armed with nuclear weapons?

The international community must stop Iran before it is too late. If Iran is not stopped, we will all face the spectre of nuclear terrorism, and the Arab Spring could soon become an Iranian winter. That would be a tragedy. Millions of Arabs have taken to the streets to replace tyranny with liberty, and no one would benefit more than Israel if those committed to freedom and peace would prevail.

That is my fervent hope, but as the Prime Minister of Israel, I cannot risk the future of the Jewish State on wishful thinking. Leaders must see reality as it is, not as it ought to be. We must do our best to shape the future, but we cannot wish away the dangers of the present.

The world around Israel is definitely becoming more dangerous. Militant Islam has already taken over Lebanon and Gaza. It is determined to tear apart the peace treaties between Israel and Egypt and between Israel and Jordan. It has poisoned many Arab minds against Jews and Israel, and against America and the West. It opposes not the policies of Israel but the existence of Israel.

Now, some argue that if we want to slow down the spread of militant Islam, especially in these turbulent times, Israel must hurry to make concessions, including territorial compromises. And this theory sounds simple. Basically it goes like this: leave the territory and peace will be advanced. The moderates will be strengthened; the radicals will be kept at bay. And do not worry about the pesky details of how Israel will actually defend itself; international troops will do the job.

These people say to me constantly, "Just make a sweeping offer, and everything will work out". There is only one problem with that theory. We have tried it and it has not worked. In 2000, Israel made a sweeping peace offer that met virtually all the Palestinian demands. Chairman Arafat rejected it. The Palestinians then launched a terror attack that claimed 1,000 Israeli lives.

In 2008, Prime Minister Olmert afterwards made an even more sweeping offer. President Abbas did not even respond to it. But Israel did more than just make sweeping offers. We actually left territory. We withdrew from Lebanon in 2000 and from every square inch of Gaza in 2005. That did not calm the militant Islamic storm that threatens us. It only brought the storm closer and made it stronger. Hizbullah and Hamas fired thousands of rockets against our cities from the very territories we had vacated.

When Israel left Lebanon and Gaza, the moderates did not defeat the radicals; the moderates were devoured by the radicals. And I regret to say that international troops, including those of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Gaza, did not stop the radicals from attacking Israel.

We left Gaza hoping for peace. We did not freeze the settlements in Gaza; we uprooted them. We did exactly what the theory says. We got out, went back to the 1967 borders and dismantled the settlements. I do not think people remember how far we went to achieve this. We uprooted thousands of people from their homes. We pulled children out of their schools and their kindergartens. We bulldozed synagogues. We even moved loved ones from their graves. And then, having done all that, we gave the keys of Gaza to President Abbas.

The theory says that it should have all worked out, and that President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority could now build a peaceful state in Gaza. We all remember that the entire world applauded our withdrawal as an act of great statesmanship and a bold act of peace. But we did not get peace. We got war. We got Iran, which, through its proxy, Hamas, promptly kicked out the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority collapsed in a day — in one day.

President Abbas just said from this rostrum that the Palestinians are armed only with their hopes and dreams. Yes, they are armed with their hopes, dreams and 10,000 missiles and Grad rockets supplied by Iran, not to mention the river of lethal weapons now flowing into Gaza from the Sinai, from Libya and from elsewhere.

Thousands of missiles have already rained down on our cities. So it might be understand, given all this, why Israelis rightly ask, "What is to prevent this from happening again in the West Bank?" Most of the major cities in the south of our country are within a few dozen kilometres from Gaza, but in the centre of the country opposite the West Bank, our cities are a few hundred metres or at most a few [illegible] metres from the edge of the West Bank.

So I want to ask: Would anyone here bring danger so close to their cities and families? Would they act so recklessly with the lives of their citizens? Israel is prepared to have a Palestinian State in the West Bank, but we are not prepared to have another Gaza there. And that is why we need to have real security arrangements, which the Palestinians simply refuse to negotiate with us.

Israelis remember the bitter lessons of Gaza. Many of Israel's critics ignore them. They irresponsibly advise Israel to go down this same perilous path again. We read what these people say and it is as if nothing happened. They just repeat the same advice and the same formulas as though none of this happened. And these critics continue to press Israel to make far-reaching concessions without first assuring Israel's security. They praise those who unwittingly feed the insatiable crocodile of militant Islam as bold statesmen. They cast as enemies of peace those of us who insist that we must first erect a sturdy barrier to keep the crocodile out, or at the very least jam an iron bar between its gaping jaws.

So in the face of the labels and the libels, Israel must heed better advice. It is better to receive bad press than a good eulogy, and better still would be a fair press whose sense of history extends beyond breakfast and that recognizes Israel's legitimate security concerns. I believe that in serious peace negotiations, these needs and concerns can be properly addressed, but they will not be addressed without negotiations.

And the needs are many, because Israel is such a tiny country. Without Judea and Samaria — the West Bank — Israel is all of nine miles wide. I want to put that in perspective for all of us in this city. It is about two-thirds the length of Manhattan. It is the distance between Battery Park and Columbia University. And let us not forget that the people who live in Brooklyn and New Jersey are considerably nicer than some of Israel's neighbours.

So how does one protect such a tiny country, surrounded by people sworn to its destruction and armed to the teeth by Iran? Obviously, one cannot defend it from within that narrow space alone. Israel

needs greater strategic depth, and that is exactly why Security Council resolution 242 (1967) did not require Israel to leave all of the territories it captured in the Six-Day War. It talked about withdrawal from territories to secure and defensible boundaries. And to defend itself, Israel must therefore maintain a long-term Israeli military presence in critical strategic areas in the West Bank.

I explained this to President Abbas. He answered that if a Palestinian State was to be a sovereign country, it could never accept such arrangements. Why not? The United States has had troops in Japan, Germany and South Korea for more than a half a century. Britain has an air base in Cyprus. France has forces in three independent African nations. None of those States claim that they are not sovereign countries.

There are many other vital security issues that also must be addressed. Take the issue of airspace. Again, Israel's small dimensions create huge security problems. The United States can be crossed by jet airplane in six hours. To fly across Israel, it takes three minutes. So is Israel's tiny airspace to be chopped in half and given to a Palestinian State not at peace with Israel?

Our major international airport is a few kilometres from the West Bank. Without peace, will our planes become targets for anti-aircraft missiles placed in the adjacent Palestinian State? And how will we stop the smuggling into the West Bank? It is not merely the West Bank; it is the West Bank mountains, which dominate the coastal plain below where most of Israel's population sits. How could we prevent the smuggling into those mountains of missiles that could be fired at our cities?

I bring up these problems because they are not theoretical problems. They are very real, and for Israelis, they are life-and-death matters. All of these potential cracks in Israel's security have to be sealed in a peace agreement before a Palestinian State is declared, not afterwards, because if it is left until afterwards they will not be sealed. And these problems will explode in our face and explode the peace.

The Palestinians should first make peace with Israel and then get their State. But I also want to say this. After such a peace agreement is signed, Israel will not be the last country to welcome a Palestinian State as a new Member of the United Nations. We will be the first.

There is one more thing. Hamas has been violating international law by holding our soldier Gilad Shalit captive for five years. They have not allowed even one Red Cross visit. He is held in a dungeon, in darkness, against all international norms. Gilad Shalit is the son of Aviva and Noam Shalit. He is the grandson of Zvi Shalit, who escaped the Holocaust by coming to the land of Israel as a boy in the 1930s. Gilad Shalit is the son of every Israeli family. Every nation represented here should demand his immediate release. If we want to adopt a resolution about the Middle East today, that is the resolution we should adopt.

Last year in Israel at Bar-Ilan University, and this year in the Knesset and the United States Congress, I laid out my vision for peace, in which a demilitarized Palestinian State recognizes the Jewish State. Yes, the Jewish State. After all, this is the body that recognized the Jewish State 64 years ago. Now, does the Assembly not think that it is about time that Palestinians did the same?

The Jewish State of Israel will always protect the rights of all of its minorities, including the more than 1 million Arab citizens of Israel. I wish I could say the same thing about a future Palestinian State, for as Palestinian officials made clear the other day — in fact, I think they did so right here in New York — the Palestinian State would not allow any Jews. They would be Jew-free — *Judenrein*. That is ethnic cleansing. There are laws today in Ramallah that make the selling of land to Jews punishable by death. That is racism. And the Assembly knows which laws this evokes.

Israel has no intention whatsoever of changing the democratic character of our State. We just do not want the Palestinians to try to change the Jewish character of our State. We want them to give up the fantasy of flooding Israel with millions of Palestinians.

President Abbas just stood here and said that the settlements lie at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Well, that is odd. Our conflict was raging for nearly half a century before there was a single Israeli settlement in the West Bank. So, if what President Abbas is saying was true, then I guess that the settlements he is talking about are Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jaffa and Be'er Sheva. Maybe that is what he meant the other day when he said that Israel had been occupying

Palestinian land for 63 years. He did not say from 1967; he said from 1948.

I hope that somebody will bother to ask him this question, because it illustrates a simple truth. The core of the conflict is not the settlements; the settlements are a result of the conflict. The settlements are an issue that has to be addressed and resolved in the course of negotiations. But the core of the conflict has always been, and unfortunately remains, the refusal of the Palestinians to recognize a Jewish State within any border.

I think it is time that the Palestinian leadership recognize what every serious international leader from Lord Balfour and David Lloyd George in 1917, to President Truman in 1948, to President Obama just two days ago right here, has recognized — that Israel is the Jewish State.

I would ask President Abbas to stop walking around this issue, recognize the Jewish State, and make peace with us. In such a genuine peace, Israel is prepared to make painful compromises. We believe that the Palestinians should be neither the citizens of Israel nor its subjects. They should live in a free State of their own. But they should be ready, like us, for compromise. And we will know that they are ready for compromise and peace when they start taking Israel's security requirements seriously and when they stop denying our historical connection to our ancient homeland. I often hear them accuse Israel of Judaizing Jerusalem. That is like accusing America of Americanizing Washington, D.C., or the British of Anglicizing London. Why are we called Jews? Because we come from Judea.

In my office in Jerusalem, there is an ancient seal. It is a signet ring of a Jewish official from the time of the Bible. The seal was found right next to the Western Wall and it dates back 2,700 years to the time of King Hezekiah. Now, the name of a Jewish official is inscribed on the ring in Hebrew. His name was Netanyahu. That is my last name. My first name, Benjamin, can be traced back a 1,000 years to Benjamin — Binyamin — the son of Jacob, who was also known as Israel. Jacob and his 12 sons roamed these same hills of Judea and Samaria 4,000 years ago, and there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the land ever since.

Those Jews who were exiled from our land — Jews in Spain, on the eve of their expulsion; Jews in Ukraine, fleeing the pogroms; Jews fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto, as the Nazis were circling around it — never stopped dreaming of coming back. They never stopped praying, they never stopped yearning. They whispered: "Next year in Jerusalem. Next year in the promised land".

As the Prime Minister of Israel, I speak for a hundred generations of Jews who were dispersed throughout the lands and suffered every evil under the sun, but who never gave up hope of restoring their national life in the one and only Jewish State.

I continue to hope that President Abbas will be my partner in peace. I have worked hard to advance that peace. The day I came into office, I called for direct negotiations without preconditions. President Abbas did not respond. I outlined a vision of peace of two States for two peoples. He still did not respond. I removed hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints to ease freedom of movement in the Palestinian areas. This facilitated fantastic growth in the Palestinian economy. But again, there was no response. I took the unprecedented step of freezing new building in the settlements for 10 months. No Prime Minister had done that before, ever. Once again, I hear applause, but there was no response. No response.

In the past few weeks, American officials have put forward ideas to restart peace talks. There were things in those ideas about borders that I did not like. There were things there about the Jewish State that I am sure the Palestinians did not like. But despite all of my reservations, I was willing to move forward on those American ideas. Why does President Abbas not join me? We have to stop negotiating about the negotiations. Let us just get on with it. Let us negotiate peace.

I spent years defending Israel on the battlefield. I spent decades defending Israel in the court of public opinion. President Abbas has dedicated his life to advancing the Palestinian cause. Must this conflict continue for generations, or will we enable our children and our grandchildren to speak in the years ahead of how we found a way to end it? That is what we should aim for, and that is what I believe we can achieve.

In two and a half years, President Abbas and I have met in Jerusalem only once, even though my door has always been open to him. If he wishes, I will come to Ramallah. Actually, I have a better suggestion. We have both just flown thousands of miles to New York.

Now we are in the same city; we are in the same building. So let us meet here today, at the United Nations. Who is there to stop us? What is there to stop us? If we genuinely want peace, what is there to stop us from meeting today and beginning peace negotiations?

I suggest that we talk openly and honestly. Let us listen to one another. Let us, as we say in the Middle East, talk *dugri*. That means "straightforward". I will tell him my needs and concerns; he will tell me his. And with God's help, we will find the common ground of peace.

There is an old Arab saying that one cannot applaud with one hand. Well, the same is true of peace. I cannot make peace alone. I cannot make peace without an interlocutor. President Abbas, I extend my hand — the hand of Israel — in peace. I hope that he will grasp that hand. We are both the sons of Abraham. My people call him Avraham; his people call him Ibrahim. We share the same patriarch. We dwell in the same land. Our destinies are intertwined. Let us realize the vision of Isaiah: "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light". (*The Holy Bible, Isaiah 9:2*). Let that light be the light of peace.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the State of Israel for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minster of the State of Israel, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden.

Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Reinfeldt (Sweden): More than 10 years ago, we decided to set eight concrete goals to free humankind from extreme poverty, from hunger and disease, and from illiteracy. We called them the Millennium Development Goals. These Goals have been powerful. They have helped the international community to monitor and mobilize resources for development cooperation.

And important progress has been made. We have seen poverty decline in many countries. By 2015, the global poverty rate is expected to fall below 15 per cent. We have seen some of the poorest countries make the greatest strides in education. Child mortality has been reduced. New HIV infections are declining steadily. Access to clean drinking water has increased. But we still have a long way to go in other areas in order to raise standards of living and offer equal opportunities to people around the globe.

Today I would like to focus on one key area where progress is still very slow. But since it affects half of the world's population and half its human resources, it is of crucial importance. I am referring to maybe the most important human rights failure of all, or at least the one that affects the largest number of human beings. I am referring to the unmet human, economic and social rights of 3.5 billion women and girls. They make up half of the world, but they are not allowed to fulfil their potential as powerful drivers of economic development as well as of peace and security.

Let me just fill members in on the situation we have today. Women perform 66 per cent of the world's work and produce 50 per cent of its food, but they earn only 10 per cent of its income and own one per cent of its property. Seventy per cent of the world's poor population are women or girls. Every day, approximately 1,000 women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. That adds up to about 350,000 deaths each year.

This week we witnessed a historic step in the history of the United Nations, when Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff became the first woman ever to open the general debate. At the same time — standing here, mid-2011 — there are still countries that do not allow women to vote. And only in 28 countries has women's parliamentary representation reached a critical mass of 30 per cent or more. Only 19 women lead their countries as elected Heads of State or Government. This is not fair. It is not just. And, frankly, it makes no sense.

To me, gender equality is first and foremost a question of ensuring equal rights for women and men. It is about giving all individuals, irrespective of gender,

the same possibilities of education, economic opportunity and participating in society. In 2011, there are women who still do not enjoy equal rights. They are refused the rights to vote, to inherit, to work and even to drive a car. And at the far end of the spectrum, women are subject to gender-based violence and rape as a weapon of war.

But gaps in these rights are not only a loss for the women affected; they are a loss to society as a whole and, I must say, very bad economic policy for the countries concerned. Not least in these times of global economic crisis, it seems obvious that we should realize the full potential of all human resources.

I will give a few examples. Closing the gap between male and female employment rates would have huge implications for the global economy. It would boost the United States gross domestic product (GDP) by as much as 9 per cent, the eurozone GDP by 13 per cent and Japanese GDP by as much as 16 per cent. But increased gender equality does not merely have immediate economic benefits; it is also an investment for the future. The evidence from a range of countries is clear. When women take greater control of household income, more money is spent on children's needs, such as food, health and education. Children grow taller, are ill less often and are likely to get better jobs. Moreover, when women play a greater part in society by shaping institutions or taking leading roles in politics or business life, there are clear improvements for the public good, and corruption is lessened. When they are present at the building of peace, results improve.

In short, I see gender equality not only as a crucial human rights issue, but also as a question of smart economics. I would urge all representatives sitting in this Hall today to imagine what it would mean in terms of economic growth for their countries if women were allowed to participate fully in society.

As technology develops, the world is changing. In one minute I can use my mobile phone to get hold of a friend on the other side of the globe or my children back home in Sweden. That is, of course, amazing. But in one minute, we can also get a first-hand report on the situation in troubled parts of the world. We can get first-hand access to pictures of abuse and violence, taken by hidden mobile phones and for the whole world to see. Today, ideas of freedom and democracy are spreading at the speed of sound. We have seen it in North Africa. We are seeing it in the Middle East. The Internet and new technology have laid out a high-speed motorway heading towards democracy and freedom. We can see that some are trying to put out roadblocks, repressive Governments try to quash the rights they fear.

The United Nations must play a leading role in embracing and maintaining those new roads to democracy and freedom. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression recently concluded that there must be as little restriction as possible of online freedom of expression. He called it an enabler of other human rights. Sweden, together with 40 other nations around the world, strongly supports his conclusion. We want to build an alliance for the freedom of the Internet, and we have launched a special initiative for democratization and freedom of expression so that we can urgently support human rights activists and agents of democratic change. The Internet is the new front line in the fight for freedom across the world.

In many countries, my own included, we take freedom for granted. In other countries, it is still a dream. This year, we have witnessed courageous people in North Africa and the Middle East taking to the streets to fight for their dream; to fight for freedom, openness and democracy. For this, they must have our support. When there are threats of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity — when autocratic rulers, as in Syria, turn their guns on their own citizens — then the international community has a responsibility to protect civilians.

Sweden hopes to play its part in this decisive phase in the region. We are contributing to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1970 (2011) and 1973 (2011) in Libya. We are providing substantial humanitarian support to several countries in North Africa and the Middle East. And when the new Governments turn to the crucial task of establishing democratic principles, the rule of law and respect for human rights, we will be ready to continue our support and do more to see the Arab Spring turn into a blossoming summer.

The European Union is firmly committed to Israel and a Palestinian State living side by side with each other in peace and security. We all want to see the peace process resume. Violations of international law

must cease. Only then can a true and lasting peace be achieved.

The Horn of Africa is suffering its worst famine in 60 years. We are faced with a huge humanitarian disaster. The international community must respond faster and better, now. Disasters such as those in Haiti, Pakistan and now in the Horn of Africa show the central importance of the United Nations in humanitarian action. The United Nations needs our full support to further improve the international response capacity.

In a globalized world, we are not just interconnected online; together we share a planet with finite resources. And yet we consume as if there was no tomorrow. I believe that sustainable development requires global solutions. In this respect, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held next year in Brazil will be very important. I am really hoping for a strong renewed political commitment to sustainable development.

We are also looking for concrete progress at the Durban Climate Change Conference in November. We know what we need and we have known it for some time — further reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. If we do not achieve that, we are simply not going to be able to reverse the trend of global warming.

These are turbulent times. Some countries are suffering from financial and economic crises; others are suffering from the severe consequences of global warming; yet others are building new societies as freedom and democracy have replaced dictatorships and repression. More than ever, there is a need for a well-functioning global arena for international cooperation and conflict resolution and for the pursuit of sustainable economic, social and environmental development. The need for a strong United Nations, based on political legitimacy, justice and human rights, is as strong as ever. Sweden will do its utmost to support a strong United Nations through substantial contributions to humanitarian and development assistance and to its work for peace, security and human rights.

We also want to help revitalize the work of the United Nations on disarmament and non-proliferation. Together with Mexico we will, as co-Chairs of the seventh Conference Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, work hard on advancing the Treaty's entry into force.

We have also presented our candidature for a seat on the Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015. As a member of the Council, Sweden would contribute actively to making it a more efficient and active body and to promoting the universal enjoyment of human rights — making rights real.

This week we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Swedish Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. He played an important role in reforming and shaping the United Nations as we know it today. Let me conclude with these words from Dag Hammarskjöld:

> "The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned".

That was true then and it is true today.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 2.25 p.m.